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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["LET ME GO!" SHE PANTED. "OH! IF YOU HAVE ANY PITY IN YOUR HEART, LET ME GO."]

NAMELESS.

PROLOGUE.

A summer's night in London, when the sun had long gone down, and the refreshing coolness of the midnight hours had succeeded the scorching noontide heat, it was pleasant out-of-doors, though there was very little air—hardly enough wind to stir the leaves of the trees. A great stillness seemed to have fallen on the earth; the theatres had emptied themselves of their patrons, the opera was over, most of the brilliant ball-rooms were deserted. Even in the far-off East the spirit of slumber had hardly given place to daily toil, and here at the West pleasure had well nigh run its course; a great hush had settled upon the vast city, and the dawn of another day was yet an hour distant.

A man stood idly near the river—a man not far from forty years of age—with a handsome, earnest face, clearly cut, aristocratic features, marked with a strange sadness, as though for him life held little worth the living for.

Yet, people would have called him one of fortune's favourites—the heir of a grand old

family, the possessor of a beautiful estate and princely income, a wife whose loveliness was the theme of a hundred tongues. Surely his lot was fair enough!

Yet he stood by the waterside with a weight of sorrow on his brow; he was thinking of a dark chapter in his life, whose shadow could never quite pass away. He was realizing bitterly that rank and wealth, admiring friends and loving wife, were not enough to fill one aching void, that he could have given up all for which men envied him if only one face might have been at his side.

He was still in evening dress, for he had but an hour quitted a brilliant ball; the diamond studs flashed in his shirt, a valuable signet ring was on his finger.

Suddenly there came towards him a woman's figure, a shrinking, trembling form clad in rusty black, a creature on whom poverty and sorrow had left heavy traces.

Lost in his reverie, the solitary dreamer never noticed her approach until her poor dress was almost touching him; then as he started from the contact he looked up abruptly and saw her face.

"Rosalie!"

The word was almost wrung from him, an anguish too deep for utterance was at his heart.

The poor trembling wail shrunk away. In all the world she had most wronged this man; of all her fellow-creatures she had least claim on him.

"Rosalie!"

He laid one hand on her shoulder to prevent her escape.

There was no anger, no reproach in his voice. It was full of an intense sadness, and it touched her more than any harshness.

She burst into tears.

She was young, still only twenty, and oh! how changed she was from the beautiful girl he remembered, whom he had last seen wearing his own betrothal ring.

"Let me go!" she panted. "Oh! if you have any pity in your heart, let me go."

"And where," he asked, in a strangely tender tone, "where would you go?"

She pointed to the river.

"It is cool and still there; at least I should

have rest," she murmured, "and I am so tired, so weary, life is so hard, let me die."

"Why don't you go home to your mother?"

She laughed bitterly.

"My mother? She would order the footman to drive me from her door; she would have no pity on me."

"My poor child," he said, "you shall suffer no longer. A brighter future is dawning for you, and I trust for me too. Come." And supporting her drooping form with his strong arm, the two figures quietly disappeared in the shadows.

CHAPTER I.

It was a bright August morning, the summer sunshine poured into the library at Trevlyn Court, and lighted up the handsome features of Sir Ronald Trevlyn, as he sat at his writing-table in earnest conversation with his lawyer.

A strikingly handsome man of seven or eight and twenty, with dark flashing eyes, luxuriant black hair, and a firm, determined expression.

The old man opposite looked at him with an anxious face.

Man and boy he had been faithful to the Trevlyns for over fifty years. He had tried in vain to check the mad extravagance of Sir Ronald's father, and he had a kind of mingled awe and pity for the young heir who had come all unprepared into such an impoverished inheritance.

"Speak plainly," commanded the baronet, simply. "Trevlyn Court is mortgaged almost to its value; there are debts and difficulties on every side; in plain, simple English I am a ruined man."

The lawyer hesitated.

"Things are hardly so bad as that; with care and economy—"

"The Trevlyns are not a careful race," interrupted their descendant. "I couldn't bring myself to count sixpences; I had rather sell the old place at once."

"It would break your mother's heart."

Sir Ronald rose, and took an abrupt turn up and down the room; if he loved any one it was his mother, the proud, haughty lady whose very life was bound up in the happiness and prosperity of the Trevlyns.

"There is only one thing for it," said the lawyer, gaining courage. "You must marry. A wife's portion will at least free the estate, and then in a few years time you would be a rich man."

Sir Ronald brought his clenched fist down on to the table.

"Tarn fortune-hunter, eh?" he said, bitterly. "I wonder you dare to offer me such advice, Ward."

"A man may marry an heiress without any loss of honour, Sir Ronald; the last of the Trevlyns is no bad match, even as things are."

"A retired butterman for a father-in-law! That would be paying a pretty price, almost too heavy a one even to save my home."

The other was silent, he knew his hint must have time to work, and, well satisfied with the beginning he had made, he followed his client into the spacious dining-room.

Lunch was already served, and Lady Trevlyn was in her place—a magnificent woman still, her beauty little impaired by her fifty years.

"Ronald," she said, after she had exchanged greetings with Mr. Ward, "I have great news for you. Lord Earl and his daughter have returned."

"Have they?" rather bitterly.

"Earlsmere has been shut up for more than eighteen years," said Lady Trevlyn, turning to Mr. Ward. "You must remember the place; it is the next estate to this, and very dreary it has been, having it unoccupied for all these years."

"I have often wondered how people could stay away from such a home," he replied.

"And the money that has been spent on it," said Lady Trevlyn, with a little sigh, showing how economical she had had to be in her gardens and furniture. "I call it willful waste; all these eighteen years Earlsmere has been

kept in as perfect order as if though its master were daily expected."

"And now he has come."

"Without a word of notice, Lord Earl was always eccentric, even as a young man."

"He had a right to please himself," said Sir Ronald, coldly. "Because a man chooses to live abroad he ought not to be pronounced mad."

"Is he married? If not, what an event his coming will be to county society," said Mr. Ward, innocently.

"He is a widower of nearly sixty, with one only daughter," and Lady Trevlyn looked impressively at her son. "Lilian Earl will be one of the greatest heiresses in England some day."

Sir Ronald quite understood all that was implied.

He helped himself to some more wine before he said, coldly,—

"I dare say she squints, or has red hair."

"Ronald!"

"Why should you endow the young lady with such misfortunes?" asked the solicitor, gravely.

"Because her father has hidden her so diligently from public view," returned Sir Ronald. "She was born abroad, and no one has ever heard anything about her. Lord Earl has lived in the South of France ever since his wife's death, and no one has ever quite known where. All inquiries have been vain; even my mother, who was the intimate friend of the late Lady Earl, has never heard anything of her daughter beyond the fact of her birth."

"I shall go and call upon her at once," decided Lady Trevlyn. "Dear girl, I dare say she feels strange and lonely in a home she has never seen. As her mother's friend, it is my duty to welcome her to Blankshire."

"And teach her manners," put in Sir Ronald, lightly; "she'll need it after eighteen years of wandering with only masculine companionship."

Lady Trevlyn flinched no reply. When she came downstairs dressed for her visit, she found her son alone, standing gravely in the great oriel window.

"Ronald, I wish you would come with me."

He shook his head.

"I don't share your romantic interest in Miss Earl, mother! I hate plain, unformed girls, and—"

She looked him full in the face.

"Do you hate Trevlyn, Ronald? Has it ever occurred to you that the Court itself may come to the hammer unless you make some sacrifice to save it?"

"Have you been talking to Ward?"

"No! I have known it long enough, only I would not worry you until I had seen the Earls. Fancy, Ronald, the master of Trevlyn and Earlsmere would be the richest landowner in the county."

"Don't build castles in the air, mother!"

"No one could refuse you, Ronald. I have never known you fail when once your mind was made up."

She said nothing more, but passed out to the waiting carriage.

Sir Ronald thought, a little sadly, unless the position of his affairs changed very rapidly, there would soon be no carriage for her to drive in. A bitter pang came to him that Mr. Ward's scheme was the only chance of saving his grand old home.

The contrast between the Court and Earlsmere struck Lady Trevlyn painfully. At the first the grounds were almost wild; the gates were rusty with time, the furniture was old and faded; a look of neglect and dreariness had settled upon the grand old place; not because its owners did not love it, but from their trying scarcity of ready-money. The velvet lawns and brilliant flower-beds, the trim, gravel walks of Earlsmere told of ample wealth—rare china and hothouse plants were tastefully grouped in the large hall, and a well-trained butler as well as two trim footmen sat there ready to announce visitors.

Miss Earl was at home, Lady Trevlyn

nerved herself for an effort as she heard that; she had come prepared to make herself exceedingly intimate with the young heiress; she meant to overlook all Lilian's faults and deficiencies, and as her mother's oldest friend love her very dearly. Whether this kindness was quite disinterested we will not say.

Woman of the world as she was, Lady Trevlyn's eyes almost filled with tears as she entered the grand drawing-room. She had not been there since the day when she had assisted Lady Earl to receive her bridal calls. She had loved her dead friend very dearly. She seemed to see her now in her girlish grace and beauty, her timid love and admiration for the stately husband who never seemed quite aware what a tender treasure he had won. Well, he had mourned her very truly, and now, after all those years, Marie Trevlyn was waiting to welcome Nora's daughter—the girl she fondly hoped would some day be Ronald's wife.

The moments seemed an eternity to Lady Trevlyn. What if her son's suspicions were true, and the heiress had, indeed, been kept carefully secluded on account of some bodily affliction? A club foot or a hump back would be a great drawback to a daughter-in-law; even the squint and red hair to which Ronald had alluded were not to be desired.

Another moment and the velvet curtains were pushed aside. A slight, girlish figure advanced towards the stranger with a perfect grace, mingled with the sweetest timidity.

All Lady Trevlyn's misgivings vanished. If this was indeed Lilian Earl, Ronald ought to be grateful she had been kept in seclusion, for she had a face fit to take the whole world by storm.

The young mistress of Earlsmere was dressed in a soft, white cambric, trimmed with dainty lace; a silver girdle fastened to the waist, and a silver arrow secured the coils of her hair, which was of the deepest, richest, golden brown. She had large dark blue eyes, fringed with long lashes, and her face had the delicate complexion tint only seen in early youth—the features were perfect in their faultless regularity; but the strange, wistful, almost pathetic smile gave a character and beauty to the whole face. When her mouth was in repose, Lilian looked a child; but when animation or interest brought that pleasing smile she was a woman.

Lady Trevlyn forgot everything, even her hopes. She took the girl into her arms, and kissed her as if she had known her all her life.

"Forgive me, my dear!" she said, kindly. "Your mother was my dearest friend. I could not let you be a day in England without coming to welcome you for her sake."

"It is very kind of you," said Lilian, speaking in a clear, musical voice, without a trace of a foreign accent. "I am so glad we have come to England, Lady Trevlyn. I have wanted to come home so often."

"And at last you persuaded your papa."

The heiress shook her head.

"He would have come long ago if I had asked him, only I knew he dreaded it, so I would not; he has only come now because the doctors insisted upon it."

"You could not have chosen a better time."

Blankshire looks its best in August."

"It is so strange to think I have never seen Earlsmere before, but I seem to know every room. I used to make papa tell me all about it."

"I hope I shall see Lord Earl!"

He came in almost as she spoke, and welcomed her with the stately courtesy she so well remembered. Two minutes convinced Lady Trevlyn that though he might not have been a devoted husband, he certainly loved his dead wife's child.

"And you have come to stay?" she asked him. "Oh! Lord Earl, I have often wondered how you could leave so fair a home."

"I shall stay," he replied, at once. "I want Lilian to feel at home here. I am getting

an old man, and I could not have left my darling alone in a foreign land."

"Old!" exclaimed his guest, with a smile. "You must not talk of being that for years. Why it seems but the other day that you and Paul were friends and companions."

"Ah! it gave me a pang when I read his death in the paper. Is Sir Ronald like him?"

"In face, nothing else. Oh! Lord Earl, I should like you to know my only son—he is the sunshine of my life."

"I hope he will come here," returned the peer, cordially. "I shall be glad to know my old friend's son. I think friendship should go by inheritance, Lady Trevlyn."

"The very thing I said to myself, as I drove over. I felt I could not leave Nora's child without a word of welcome."

Lord Earl dropped the carved ivory paper-knife with which he had been toying—a strikingly nervous man, his fingers were often playing with something as he talked.

"Lilian does not favour her parents," said Lady Trevlyn, presently. "She is not in the least like Nora, and I can trace no resemblance to you, Lord Earl."

"Why papa says I am my mother's image!" said Lilian, in a surprised voice.

Lord Earl made no remark, and the guest felt instinctively she had pained them both.

"He must only say so because he wishes to believe it," she told her son afterwards. "Nora was a sparkling brunette, this child is as fair as—as her name," at a loss for a simile.

Very soon after that, Lady Trevlyn took her leave, having made father and daughter promise her a speedy visit at the Court. She drove off well pleased at the success of her afternoon's expedition.

Left alone, Lord Earl took a low stool at her father's feet.

"Is it really true, dear?" she said, wistfully. "I like to think I remind you of mamma."

"You are your mother's image, my darling!" he cried, fondly putting his hand on her bowed head. "Let who will contradict it. Heaven bless you, and give you a longer life, a happier fate than hers."

"She must have been happy," said Lilian, dreamily, "you loved her so."

"Love is not all," said Lord Earl, slowly.

"I think it must be the only thing worth having," replied Lilian. "I could bear any troubles if only I had you."

"You will have a nearer, dearer love some day, my darling. Lilian I have come to England for that, and that only. I want my child to be happy in a husband's keeping, safe from all dangers in a husband's love before I leave her."

"Don't," she whispered, kissing him, "dear, nothing in the whole world could make me happy if I lost you."

"Do you like Lady Trevlyn?"

Lilian hesitated.

"I think I am afraid of her, papa; I should not like to have Lady Trevlyn for an enemy. She looks to me as if she could kill me with her eyes if she were offended."

Some days later, Sir Ronald, entering the drawing-room abruptly, found his mother entertaining visitors; he almost started at the beautiful vision presented to him as Miss Earl. With a rare prudence Lady Trevlyn had said very little of Lilian's attractions; Sir Ronald had been too indifferent to ask questions; and so, though his mother had denied the existence of the squint or club foot, he had only been prepared for a very ordinary young lady. He saw a fragile, delicate-looking girl, with a lovely flowerlike face, and a manner as courtly and high-bred as his own.

"She is lovely now," he thought, a little wistfully. "In a few years' time she will be perfect; now she is almost a child. Those blue eyes are innocent and unconscious. She hardly knows her own attractions. When once that sleeping heart has awoke, when love shines in those blue eyes, she will be a creature made to win men's hearts and break them."

For once inclination and duty went hand in hand, for once judgment and fancy agreed. Sir Ronald knew his whole future depended on his wooing an heiress, and here almost at his threshold was the heiress, endowed with ample wealth and rare beauty.

The baronet had never liked to think of marriage. In half-an-hour he had decided it would be more than endurable with such a wife as Lilian Earl.

And that first meeting was the prelude to many more. If ever fortune, fate, and friends favoured a pair of lovers, all these three powers smiled upon Sir Ronald's hopes.

His mother treated Lilian as a special favourite, and had her often at the Court.

Lord Earl seemed never quite so happy as when his old friend's son was at Earlsmere. If ever man was given time, occasion, and excuse for falling in love, the baronet was given them when fate threw him constantly in the society of Lilian Earl.

There were rides in the fair, open country, wanderings in the beautiful grounds of Earlsmere, pleasant evenings when Lord Earl had the newspaper, and Lilian sang touching ballads, which stirred Sir Ronald's heart as nothing had ever done before.

He loved her. In less than a month he had known his own secret. He began by thinking of the advantages such a match would bring him. He ended by loving her passionately, madly.

There was nothing unselfish in his affection, it was like the man's whole character.

Strong, violent, and determined from boyhood, Ronald Trevlyn had never failed in anything he undertook.

He meant to marry Lilian Earl. He would make her a good husband, perhaps, though he would bend her will to his, and treat her as something entirely his own.

He never thought of her refusing him—never dreamed how far unworthy he was of her.

Ronald Trevlyn had no misgivings. He could see that Lord Earl favoured his suit, and the peer's consent was what had alone seemed doubtful to him.

And Lilian, to the girl who had led a lonely secluded life, with no friend or companion but her father, Sir Ronald Trevlyn was like a hero of romance.

His handsome face, fascinating manner, and noble bearing impressed her fancy.

She liked the shade of authority in his voice, it was something quite new to her. His mother's affection, warm and caressing as it was, never impressed her so much as the air of appropriation with which he took a seat beside her.

She wondered sometimes how he could care to spend so much time with one who knew so little of the world.

Simple, guileless Lilian, never once did it enter her mind that she was an heiress, and Sir Ronald Trevlyn a needy, embarrassed man.

"Lil," said Lord Earl, one night after the baronet had left them, "come here, I want to talk to you."

She sat on a stool at his feet, her golden head supported against his knee.

It was just as well, perhaps, her blue eyes could not read his face, for a great sadness reigned there.

"What is it, dad?"

"When I knelt by your mother's deathbed, Lil, when I took her ice-cold hand in mine, I swore a solemn oath that, Heaven helping me, you should never know a sorrow! Little girl, have I kept that vow?"

"Faithfully," she answered, "no sorrow has ever touched me. I wonder sometimes if it is all too bright to last!"

"I am getting old," said Lord Earl, slowly. "Dear, I may not be much longer at your side. Ronald Trevlyn has asked me to-night to give you to him. Lil, his father was my greatest friend—extravagant and wilful, lavish and rash, but tender-hearted always!"

Lilian nestled the least bit closer to him.

"Ronald loves you," went on her father,

slowly. "He comes of a grand old family; his mother would welcome you as a daughter! Tell me, Lil, what do you think?"

"I will never leave you!"

But he saw the tears shining in her eyes.

"Your marriage will ease my greatest anxiety, dear! If you love Ronald Trevlyn I will give you to him gladly, freely, even though the giving condemned me to a lonely life!"

Sir Ronald called the next day, and Lord Earl sent him straight to the drawing-room.

Very gently, yet with an air of proud possession, the master of Trevlyn Court took Lilian's hand.

"Your father told me to seek my answer from yourself. Lilian, will you be my wife?" She looked at him with an April face.

"Do you really love me?"

"I love you more than I thought I could love anything!" he answered. "The first day I saw you I made up my mind to win you. Lilian, can't you trust yourself to me? Indeed, I will make you happy if heart and life can? You are my first and only love, the first woman who has ever touched my heart!"

The girl's eyes drooped beneath his gaze. The baronet knew his cause was won. He flung one arm round Lilian, and drawing her close to himself, pressed passionate kisses on her unresisting lips.

"My own!" he whispered fondly, "no one in all the world shall rob me of you, Lilian, my beautiful white flower; you are mine for ever."

Her fair head rested on his shoulder; she never resisted his proud air of possession, his passionate caresses; he was her love, her hero, her knight.

"Kiss me!" he enjoined, stroking her fair hair. Then as she did his bidding, and he strained her to his heart, it seemed to Ronald Trevlyn that for once fortune had been kind to him—the one woman whom in all the world he desired would be his own.

"You will come to me soon," he urged; "darling, I cannot do without my wife."

"It is all so new and strange; you have known me such a little time."

"Long enough to love you dearer than all else, Lilian. I shall get Lord Earl to plead my cause."

A little more lovers' talk, and the two separated. Sir Ronald went home to bear the good news to his mother.

Lilian sank back upon the sofa in a kind of day-dream, trying to realize her happiness and wishing, oh! so much, that the mother she had never known could come back if it were but for a moment, from the cloudless shore, to fold her to her heart, and bear her sympathy in this crisis in her life.

Her mother was to Lilian but an empty name; her father was her friend, guide, and counsellor. When the first rapture of that interview was over, when she felt a little composed, she went in search of him, but the search proved unavailing.

Lord Earl was not in the library, not in the smoking-room; in vain she sought him in all his favourite haunts; at last, in despair, she returned to the drawing-room, and rang the bell.

"Where is my father?" she asked the footman. She heard then that Lord Earl was engaged in a little room he called his office.

"I thought the steward came this morning?"

"Yes, miss; this is a person who requested to see his lordship on particular business. She would take no denial."

Lilian, wondering a little, dismissed the man, and taking up a trifle of fancy work was soon trying to fix her attention upon it. She little guessed the scene that was going on downstairs, or the important part it would play in her own history.

In his own office-chair sat Lord Earl, his head thrown wearily back, as though mind and body were alike weary. He looked very different now from the courtly host Lady Trevlyn knew or the tender father Lilian loved.

The veins in his forehead stood out like

purple cords; a heavy shadow was on his brow; he startled at every sound, as though he feared an interruption to the interview, and yet he was so heart-sick and weary he would gladly have dismissed his visitor had he only dared.

She stood opposite to him as great a contrast to the peer, aye, and to the room itself, as could well be found. A woman of the people, tall, large-boned, with a red face and bloodless lips, with black hair pushed back behind a bonnet, and hanging in untidy wisps; her dress, which had collected a quantity of damp mud, was full and long, forming almost a train behind; her red ungloved hands were spread out defiantly, and, instead of being awed by the unusual splendour of her surroundings, she seemed to be perfectly assured of her own right to be there.

"It's not a bit of good talking," she said, in a loud, insolent voice; "if ye're so close fisted ye w'en't part with a few pounds I can go to them as will."

Lord Earl fairly groaned.

"You have no legal claim on me, none whatever, and you know it perfectly."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I daresay you're a bit vexed at my turning up to-day, seeing I wasn't invited; but law, it 'ud been just the same. I've been waiting all these years for the chance of your coming back to England; and now here you are, and—and the matter's just in a nutshell—pay me what I want, or I'll just be off to those as will."

"And what security shall I have that you will keep your word?"

The woman laughed insolently.

"I reckon I shall keep it till hunger grips me again, or my man's out of work. I think my terms are fair enough."

"I have a great mind to send for a policeman, and give you in charge, Mrs. Bond!"

"I reckon as you'll think better of it, Lord Earl. Come!" persuasively; "what's a fi-pun note to such as you?"

Lord Earl took out his cheque-book, but the woman shook her head.

"Folks like us can't get 'em changed; better stick to the yellow boys!"

With an expression of disgust he counted five sovereigns from his purse and offered them to her. She took them up without a word of gratitude.

"You won't see me again till we're down in our luck. I'm awful glad you're back in England, I am; I said directly we heard it you'd be as good as an annuity to us."

He answered nothing; he bore the woman's insolence with a strange persistent patience. He himself ushered Mrs. Bond to the door, and saw her safely off the premises; only when she was out of sight did he press one hand to his heart and mutter,—

"That pain again, I really must see someone! Well! I thought I was safe after all these years. I wonder how many five pounds will keep Mrs. Bond quiet. I wish I had never come back to England. But for this affair of Lillian's and young Trevlyn! Would it make any difference to him if he knew all? No! Why should I misjudge him. No doubt he is like his father, true of heart; but oh! my child, my little Lil, Heaven grant I have not kept my miserable secret all these years only to make you wretched at last. How that woman has altered, gone steadily down hill all these years I should say. Strange how I have dreaded her coming; since we reached Earlsmere every day I have feared and dreaded her. Well, the worst is over now, and at least one thing is fortunate, she did not see Lillian."

It was getting late now—the short October day was closing in. Going upstairs he found Lillian in the drawing-room, dressed for dinner in pale blue cashmere, white hothouse flowers at her throat, and in the coils of her golden hair.

"Where have you been, papa?" she cried. "I have wanted you so!"

He held her fondly in his arms. All that

afternoon he had been reviewing his life's history, and wondering if he had acted wisely. The sight of Lillian's face, of the deep thoughtful happiness shining in her blue eyes, satisfied him as nothing else had done.

"Sir Ronald has gone home," she said, softly. "Papa, are you glad?"

"I am very glad if you are happy!"

"So happy," she whispered in his ear. "Papa, I think this is the brightest day of all my life!"

He was not given to emotion—a reserved self-contained man his friends called him—and yet at Lillian's speech a tear rolled down his cheek, and fell upon her hand.

"It is coming right," he murmured to himself; "it was for her sake. I wronged no one. I did it for my darling, and it was worth it all; worth the long years of exile—the concealment, the deception; aye, if I had it to do again I would do it fearlessly—for her sake!"

It was getting dark; Lillian would have rung for lights, but he stayed her hand.

"I like the firelight best; you do not want to work or read, Lil; sit here by me!"

She came at once, slid her hand into his, and sat down at his feet. Then a great silence fell upon them both. Lil was thinking of her lover, of the great strange future which stretched before her. Lord Earl was busy with the past, the secret of his life, his sorrows and his sin. He held Lillian's hand in his; from time to time he stroked her golden hair, but he was not thinking of her. For him the years had rolled away, and he saw her mother sitting there—her mother whom he had loved and lost.

So long did the silence last that Lillian grew uneasy. The ornate clock on the mantelpiece chimed eight; it was their dinner-hour; another minute, and the butler would appear. It was surely time to arouse her father. Rising, she laid one hand gently upon his shoulder.

"Papa!"

She noticed then that his eyes were closed. Her voice roused him, he opened them, and stirred half uneasily.

"It is all right, my darling," he said, slowly; "I have kept your secret, and she is happy."

With a strange, sick faint dread Lillian realized his mind was wandering.

"It is I, papa, dear; do wake up and speak to me."

But though his eyes were fixed upon her face there was no sign he knew her. He seemed to be speaking to her, and yet his words must have been meant for someone else—no doubt her mother—his dear, dead wife.

"It has been a weary waiting, dear," he said, half brokenly, "but it is over now—I am coming my own, my darling—" And even as he spoke he surely must have gone to the one he so much loved—his head fell back on the cushions. Lillian bending over him felt that something awful had happened. She tore to the bell, and pulled it violently. The servants came in alarm, and tried to rouse their master. At last the old housekeeper put an arm round the trembling girl and took her to her own room, where she whispered to her that the silent form they had left on the sofa was not Lord Earl, but only his poor cold remains—he himself, the tender, generous father who had ever stood between Lillian and all sorrow had gone over to the great majority. Weeping bitterly Lillian flung herself on her bed, the one ray of comfort in her misery that she was not utterly alone—there was one who would share her sorrow and soothe her tears—her future husband, Sir Ronald Trevlyn.

CHAPTER II.

LORD EARL was dead. The doctor was sent for at once; every possible effort to restore him was made, but all in vain. Death must have been instantaneous the man of physic told the housekeeper, and quite painless. There sitting tranquilly in the autumn firelight, with his

daughter beside him, the spirit had returned to the God who gave it.

"But my lord was quite well," declared the faithful servant, almost unable to realize the truth; "he was not a strong man, perhaps, but he never ailed anything, never uttered a complaint."

"It was heart disease," the doctor explained; "some terrible shock must have befallen him. Poor child," as he looked at Lillian's unconscious face. "It will be a bitter awakening for her."

She was lying on her own bed sleeping under the influence of a composing draught. So beautiful and placid was her face it was terrible to think of what her awakening must be.

"You must send for her friends at once."

"I can't, sir."

Dr. West started.

"It is impossible. Miss Earl can't be left here alone; you had better send for her nearest relations at once."

"How can I, sir? The master was the last of his family; my lady was an only child. There may be cousins of hers alive, but I'm sure I don't know where to find them."

Dr. West remembered Trevlyn Court, and how intimate its mistress had been with Lord Earl—the open rumour which linked Lillian's name with the baronet's. He left Earlsmere, feeling the kindest service he could render the orphan was to send her friend at once.

Lady Trevlyn and Sir Ronald had just finished dinner when he reached the Court; something unusual in his manner struck them both even before he spoke.

"I am come to ask your aid in an errand of mercy, Lady Trevlyn," he began; "I have grievous news for you. Lord Earl is dead, and that poor girl has no one but servants with her."

Mother and son grew pale with consternation.

"I will go at once," said the former, starting up! "But oh! Dr. West, how terribly sudden! Has there been an accident? How did it happen?"

"It was heart disease," he said, simply. "Lord Earl was sitting with his daughter in the drawing-room, and he passed away quite suddenly. I believe you knew the family well. Can you tell me of any relations whom I ought to summon?"

"I believe they had no relations in the world. Lord Earl was the last of his family."

"Poor child! what a fate for her. Of course he has left her under some guardianship; but it is terrible to think of her being alone in the world at nineteen."

"She will not be alone long, doctor," said Lady Trevlyn, meaningly; "I hope, she will be my daughter very soon."

When Lillian opened her eyes with the strange, bewildered look which always comes in the first awakening after any sorrow, Lady Trevlyn was sitting by the bedside, and the orphan soon found herself clasped in the arms of her future mother-in-law, who strove by many a tender word to soothe her grief; but Lillian sobbed on. She felt that Lady Trevlyn was very kind; but the kindness could not reach her heart. She had room but for one thought now that her father was dead, that the voice she best loved would speak to her on earth never more.

"You must come home with me," said Lady Trevlyn, when the sobs had subsided, and Lillian, looking the very shadow of her former self, was sitting pale and wan in the cold, grey dawn of the October morning.

"Please let me stay here," pleaded the girl; "he won't be left me much longer; let me be with him while I can."

"You will make yourself ill with grief."

"I should grieve just as much anywhere. Oh! father, father! how could you leave me all alone?"

"Not alone, Lillian," said Lady Trevlyn, meaningly; "have you forgotten the promise you gave Ronald yesterday? Don't you re-

member you are to be a very daughter of my own?"

But the thought brought no comfort to the girl, she seemed too utterly stunned to realise it.

"I can do nothing with her," confided Lady Trevlyn to her son, when he rode over after breakfast; "she sits pale and motionless as a statue, and never seems to hear what I say to her."

"Poor child!" he said, pityingly; "it is a sudden blow."

"You will go to her, Ronald; you may be able to make her hear reason, and return with me to the Court."

He went in alone. Good Heaven! Was this the bright, beautiful creature he had seen only yesterday? Why she looked as if she had been ill for weeks; her cheeks were pale as marble; there were purple rings round her blue eyes; she hardly seemed to heed his approach, but Ronald Trevlyn cared nothing for that; she was his own, she belonged to him, and he would persuade her to do his will, of course, for her own good.

"Lilian!"

She turned her face towards him, and its despair touched him to the heart. He flung his arms round her, he stroked her soft hair lovingly, and called on her by every fond name to look up and speak to him.

"You are not all alone, my darling; you have me left. Lilian, you must come to us, and let my mother cheer and comfort you."

"I would rather stay here."

"Why?"

"I feel nearer to him here."

"You must not think only of him, dear; don't you remember yesterday you promised to give yourself to me? Lilian, for my sake, you must come away!"

She looked at him with piteous entreaty.

"Let me stay!"

"I will bring you back; you must come now," and taking up her hat he put it on with almost a woman's care, wrapped her in a warm shawl, and then carried rather than led her downstairs to where his mother's carriage was waiting.

Her ladyship had gone home before resigning the task of persuasion to him.

With his own hand he lowered the blinds, placed himself at Lilian's side, and drew the weary, golden head to rest on his shoulders.

"It is my right to take care of you now," he said, fondly, "and I mean to exercise it!"

She submitted like a worn-out child. As yet she did not realise the change twenty-four hours had made in her life.

She loved Ronald Trevlyn with that purest of all affections—a girl's first love. To her he was like a knight of olden days. His mother's tenderness had failed to touch her heart, but his own affection was very precious to her, and Ronald felt, as he caressed her, that his lot was not now so hard to bear, for she was the only creature he had ever loved, and with herself she would give him wealth ample to restore his grand old home, and enable him to take his rightful position in the county.

The prettiest spare room had been made ready, and Ronald laid his betrothed upon the sofa with a tenderness which was something new to him. Then he left her to rest, and followed his mother to her boudoir.

"I wonder what sort of a will Lord Earl has made!" began Lady Trevlyn, abruptly.

"Of course, everything must go to Lilian, as he has no relations; but it will be satisfactory to know as soon as possible to whose guardianship he has left her."

"West has telegraphed to his solicitor, and also to a Captain Beaumont, who is a sort of cousin to the late Lady Earl."

A strange shadow crossed Lady Trevlyn's face.

"I suppose there can be no doubt about Lilian's heiress-ship," she said, suddenly; "it would be an awful thing if her wealth proved a delusion, for you have quite committed yourself now!"

"It will be no delusion," returned Ronald, quickly. "When I saw Lord Earl and asked

for his daughter he told me she would have fifty thousand pounds on her wedding-day and everything he possessed at his death. It seems the entail on Earlsmere was cut off and all was in his power; he could leave everything to the merest stranger. Those were his words."

"But he would not have done so."

"No, he loved her too well to disinherit her. Mother, I expect the world at large will set me down as a fortune-hunter."

"You are not that," cried his mother, indignantly. "Any one can see that Lilian is your choice, and really, with a face like that, it is an insult to her as well as you to suggest anything else."

The day passed very quietly.

Lilian Earl did not leave her own sitting-room, but Sir Ronald spent most of his time with her.

Until the solicitors of the late Lord Earl appeared no arrangements could be made for the funeral.

It struck the Trevlyns as a little strange that no reply came from either these gentlemen or Captain Beaumont; but in the evening, while Sir Ronald was sitting with his betrothed, a card was brought him inscribed with the officer's name.

Sir Ronald hurried to the library, where he had held his memorable interview with Mr. Ward, and found a tall, soldierly man awaiting him with ill-suppressed impatience.

"Sir Ronald," began the stranger, "I have come on a very disagreeable errand."

This was not encouraging.

The baronet merely bowed, and requested his visitor to be seated.

"I would rather stand," said Captain Beaumont. "When you have heard what I have to say you may not care to offer me a chair. The bearer of bad news is never welcome, but after Dr. West's telegram and your letter I felt it my duty to come here and see you, however painful such a task might be."

"I can only conclude," said the baronet, stiffly, "that you come as Miss Earl's guardian to object to her engagement to myself. I can assure you that our betrothal had her father's full and free consent."

"My errand is altogether different. You tell me that my late cousin's husband left a daughter aged nineteen, whom you propose to make your wife. I think I have stated the facts correctly."

"Perfectly."

"Then, Sir Ronald, you are either the victim of an impostor or there is some extraordinary delusion. Lord Earl never had a daughter!"

Sir Ronald Trevlyn stared.

"You must be dreaming."

"Hear me out. My cousin Nora was brought up with me as a sister. I was intimate with her and her husband throughout their married life. I accompanied them abroad. I was present at Lady Earl's deathbed. Now, do you mean to say that if she had had a daughter I should not have been cognizant of it?"

"It is the most extraordinary statement I ever heard. Lord Earl returned to England this summer with a young lady, whom he installed mistress of his house and introduced to the county as his daughter."

"That proves nothing."

"I think it proves a great deal."

"He never introduced her to his wife's family; he shunned every relation of that wife ever since her death. You may ask anyone you please, Sir Ronald; they will tell you the same story. My cousin Nora, Lady Earl, died childless."

"Do you think there was a second marriage?"

"How could there be? Nora has been dead barely eighteen years! This girl, on your own showing, is nineteen. You may be angry with me, Sir Ronald, but I have come here to-night, in all kindness, to tell you the truth before it is too late."

It was too late already, as far as Ronald's heart went, but he did not say so.

"Then, whom do you suppose Miss Earl can be—a relation?"

"The Earls have no relations. I am utterly at sea. I have been to Lord Earl's solicitors, and they can throw no light on the subject, save that they drew up a will a great many years ago, leaving everything he possessed to his adopted child—generally known as Lilian Earl. The senior partner was appointed guardian and trustee to the young lady, and I believe he is quite willing to act."

"And you have seen the will?"

"No; it seems it was in his own possession. Martin came down from London with me; he has gone to Earlsmere to make all arrangements, and search for the will. We both felt it due to you that you should know the truth at once."

It was impossible to doubt the captain's sincerity, his manner was the essence of frank simplicity. Ronald Trevlyn put one hand to his aching brow; truly, things were not going after his wishes.

"Poor child!" said the soldier, pityingly.

"From all I hear I expect she has not the slightest idea of all this. If it could possibly be managed, she ought never to know it."

"I would be no party to such a conspiracy!" said Trevlyn, bitterly. "I consider I have been shamefully treated, and that your cousin has behaved abominably from first to last."

"Very probably, had his life been spared, he would have told you himself," impelled by the baronet's manner to take his dead friend's part; though he had come to the Court very full of sympathy with its master.

"He ought to have told me at once."

"But your engagement only dates from the day of his death. If you don't care to marry the young lady as his adopted daughter and heiress, you will be perfectly free to resign all claims to her hand."

"And break my word?"

"There would be no dishonour in it," said the other, coldly. "If the girl were penniless and homeless it would be the basest shame to desert her; but the heiress of fifteen thousand a-year will not be left long to wear the willow if you did not deem her worthy to share your name."

"You are mocking me."

"No; the affair is very sad from first to last; and yet poor Earl doubtless acted for the best, and no one will blame your decision. If you love the girl, surely my cousin's heiress cannot be considered a *mésalliance*. If you regard your name too much to shame it with her, why, as I said before, no one would cry shame on you for giving up one who would have brought you an immense fortune."

Both men had remained standing, and now the captain moved towards the door.

"I should like to see her," he said, slowly; "but it is too soon to think of that; a stranger must not intrude upon her grief."

"You will surely stay the night? My mother—"

"A thousand thanks, but I am to sleep at Earlsmere. Martin relies on my assistance."

He did not offer Sir Ronald his hand; it was strange how his feelings had changed since entering the house. He had come there full of sympathy for the ancient family he deemed so imposed on, and not a little indignant with the poor girl who had posed as his cousin's daughter. He went away full of a profound pity for the girl who thought herself Lilian Earl, if she was compelled to pass her life at Sir Ronald's side.

"He won't give her up, her fortune will keep him faithful; but he will never forgive her the deception. Poor child! I wonder if she loves him? I daresay she does; women have a knack of fancying men utterly unworthy of them. Sleep there, indeed! Why, once or twice I was longing to knock him down as it was. I shall give Martin a hint what sort of fellow he is. If he is sole guardian he ought to refuse his consent to the marriage until he is quite sure his ward's happiness is bound up in it."

He found the solicitor waiting for him with a strangely-troubled face. The two men had

been friends from boyhood; in fact, they had been schoolfellows, and at forty-five and fifty a real intimacy united them.

"Well," said Mr. Martin, eagerly; "what news? Was Sir Ronald ready to knock you down?"

"He was far more ready to abuse poor Earl."

"What sort of a man?"

"I don't like him."

The lawyer laughed, he really could not help it.

"That's no answer."

"Well, then, he's selfish to the very core. I'm sure he was divided only between the grief of resigning the girl's fortune and a desire to break off the engagement to avenge the deception practised on him."

"Did you see her?"

"No; I meant to hate her, but when I had once seen the man she was to spend her life with I was ready to do anything for her."

"Strange! Every one speaks well of Sir Ronald."

"He's an intensely cautious man—not the sort to make enemies."

"What could your cousin have seen in him?"

Cecil Beaumont shrugged his shoulders.

"Goodness knows! Have you searched among the private papers yet, Martin?"

"Yes," succinctly.

"Well!"

"It isn't well, at all. That's all I found."

And he showed a letter addressed in the hand both knew so well—"To Lillian."

"And the will?"

"He's destroyed it."

"What?"

"It's too true. I suppose this engagement necessitated fresh arrangements; but why couldn't he have waited a few days? Why will people keep their wills themselves?"

Cecil Beaumont was silent from sheer amazement; for quite five minutes no one spoke, then the soldier said, sadly—

"So ends all chance of Lillian's becoming Lady Trevelyan."

"Surely the man won't dare to desert her!"

"He will, mark my words."

"Well, it's a sad business!"

"Who takes the property? If they've a heart in their body they'll provide for the girl."

Mr. Martin shook his head.

"It may be years before we discover the heirs. Lord Earl and his father before him were both only children; it will rest among the descendants of his great grandfather—a pretty remote relation to come into this place and that splendid income! It's enough to bring the poor fellow back to life, the injustice of it. All he has must go to enrich a positive stranger, whom he has never seen; and his own darling, whom he cherished as his very life, is left penniless, to the mercy of the world!"

The soldier's only answer was a question, which had never occurred to either of them before—

"Who is to tell her?"

(To be continued.)

The wise men of old have sent most of their morality down the stream of time in the slight skiff of apothegm or epigram.

The Botanical Gardens, Regent's Park, continue in most satisfactory condition; both as regards the quality of their exhibitions and the receipts of the year, judging from the recent annual report. New plants and fresh varieties of old favourites appear in increased numbers every year at the shows, and this summer the display of orchids was unusually fine. Botanical students and artists highly value the Society's assistance, and no fewer than 60,000 out specimens were distributed, and 330 free admissions granted for the purpose of study.

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Now this is a curious coincidence!" exclaimed Sir Edward, as he looked up from a letter he was in the act of reading the next morning. "Here's a letter about you, Vere, just as if she knew you were staying in the house!"

"About me? Who can it be from?" setting down his coffee-cup and beginning to stare.

He was not one of those men who think it only natural that they should occupy women's pens as well as their tongues.

"Lady Kindersly, a dear old friend of mine, but as mad as a March hare; but you shall judge for yourself! As we are all friends here,"—looking round the table, where there was only one chair empty, and that was his nephew's—"it can be no breach of confidence to read it out. I will pass over the beginning of it. Ahem!" clearing his throat and adjusting his glasses—"Many years ago, when I was staying in Devonshire with my dear old friend Mary Curtis—who died last year to my infinite regret—I was walking along the beach, when I saw some children playing on the rocks far in advance. I had scarcely noticed them, when a child clambered on to a particularly large boulder, and in another moment his foot slipped, and he fell into the sea. I screamed and ran as fast as I could to the spot, but the child would have been drowned before I could reach him if another boy had not jumped into the water in a most courageous manner and dragged him back into safety. I suppose you have heard all this before, as the child who was saved was your nephew?"

"Indeed, I hadn't!"—and his preserver, who had a most interesting countenance, with frank, blue eyes and golden curls, gave the name of Cyril Vere, from Rutlandshire. I am a lonely old woman, with curious fancies, and it occurred to me that I should much like to trace the subsequent career of this gallant child, whose bravery should never be allowed to pass into oblivion. Hearing from Mrs. Arkwright, when she was in London a fortnight ago, that you had a young lady from Rutlandshire now living under your roof, I am in hopes that she may be able to give me some particulars concerning this young gentleman, who comes from the same county as herself. Fortunately, Rutland is the smallest of all our counties, so the clue is not so vague as it sounds. If you can glean any information, and will forward it as soon as you conveniently can, you will be conferring a great favour. If the young gentleman is anywhere within reach, I should be very grateful if he would come and see me at my usual address, 19, Chesterfield-gardens."

"There, what do you think of that?" A chorus of exclamations rose on every side, but Vere took it all very quietly.

"If I were you," said Sir Edward, with a smile, "I would go up at once, or she might go off the hook without having had time to leave you her fortune!"

"Do you think she would really care?" listlessly, as if the matter did not concern him much.

"I am sure she would! There's a train at 12.30, if you like to try your luck to-day!"

"I promised Colonel Deyncourt to go over there. I think it will do just as well to-morrow, or rather, Monday; and then I can send a line to prepare her."

"You don't seem over keen about it!"

"You see the lady is old, not young!"

"All the more likely to do you a good turn! Another cup of tea, my dear," to his wife.

"And so you actually saved Godfrey's life?" said Meta, looking up at Vere with fervent gratitude.

"What friends you ought to be, for ever and ever!"

"On the contrary. According to the old adage, the life that you save is sure to be either your death or your ruin."

"Not likely in this case!" and Meta smiled confidently, whilst Nella looked up at him with a questioning glance, and their eyes met.

Both instantly felt that the ruin of their happiness might well come through Godfrey Somerville, though neither would have cared to confess the fear.

Was it only twenty-four hours since Nella had sat at that same breakfast-table, bubbling over with spirits and fun, ready to laugh at the weakest joke, and adding her own share to the general stork?

Cyril was sitting beside her as he did then, attending to all her wants, it is true, but with a grave politeness as if she had been a stranger, rather than the girl who considered herself even more than a sister.

Unless he roused himself with a transparent effort at cheerfulness, his face was stern as a general's on the eve of a battle with the responsibility of a whole army on his shoulders, and Nella felt as lively as if she had had a mummy for her next-door neighbour.

She made her head ache trying to conceive what had brought this new estrangement between them, but could imagine no possible reason for it.

Once or twice she found Mr. Mallon's eyes, from under their bushy, red eyebrows, fixed on her with an expression of sympathy, mixed with speculation, which seemed to imply that he was in the secret.

Something must have occurred during the course of their ride, because she met them in the hall, and noticed the change at once in Cyril before Somerville had time to meet them, and concoct any falsehoods about her.

Perhaps Miss Arkwright had poisoned his mind; and yet what had she ever done to earn her ill-will?

Then she suddenly recollected how she had released Godfrey from his attendance upon her, and Dulcie had burst into tears.

There was some mystery about them all that she could not fathom, and Miss Arkwright might have imagined from her simple action that she was leagued with Somerville against them.

Still Cyril would surely tell her that she was mistaken after the explanation of the night before. Surely he could not think evil of her after that?

Determined to break the ice, she turned to him playfully, just as Godfrey came in, and asked if he had any more buttons to be swapped.

"Thanks, they didn't come off! What are you going to do, Miss Somerville, when we are all out?"

"Amuse ourselves, as well as we can! Colonel Deyncourt ought to have known better than to leave us out! Shall we go for a ride, Nella?"

"I—I've got such a headache!"

Cyril turned his head quickly and looked at her, but said nothing; whilst Lady Somerville remarked, from the top of the table: "Then you had better lie down, my dear, and no one shall disturb you! There is nothing like rest for a headache; and, Meta, you and I might go and pay that call which has been owing such a long time to the Hargreaves."

"Very well; mamma that will do very well."

"I shall slip away from the Deyncourts as early as I can, Meta," and Godfrey looked across the table at Nella, although purporting to address his betrothed.

Happening to catch Mr. Mallon's eyes she most inopportunistically grew crimson, and, biting her lip with vexation, immediately announced her intention of going for a long walk.

"Yes, go out and seek an adventure," said Somerville, encouragingly. "Only tell us in which direction, that we may know where to find you."

"I don't want to be found."

"But you generally like to be met."

Again she felt Cyril's eyes upon her, and her colour rose. "How 'generally'?"

He smiled, as he stirred his coffee.

Knowing what his object was, she felt as if

she would like to strangle him. Looking at Mr. Mallon, who for the moment seemed her only friend, she said, with a forced smile,—

"Whenever I go out alone, I never meet anyone but the labourers; and, do you know, sometimes I am almost afraid of them. If they chose to knock me down and rob me it would be so easy."

"Yes, but detection would be easy too; and you would probably have but little in your pocket. Still, if I had these fancies," he added with a smile, "I think I should stick to the grounds. There is plenty of space, and no danger."

"But Miss Maynard does not object to danger in the usual run," said Cyril, abruptly. "She hates monotony, and would fret herself to death if she thought her life were going to be as commonplace as other peoples!" remembering with renewed bitterness how she had rebelled against the level monotony of Elstone.

"Some people are content to be dormice, asleep for more than half the year. I don't see that they are better than others," she said, resentfully; "and I don't intend to copy them."

"Don't! Originality is refreshing," put in Godfrey; "and there is very little of it left in the world."

"Nun's Tower is about the most original place I ever saw," and Cyril looked at him sharply. "I should think the owner must match it."

"Ifancy he's a money-grubbing stock-broker; but I really don't know," said Somerville, carelessly. "You all seem so madly interested that I wonder you don't try to find out."

"Interested is a strong word—curious would be better," said Mr. Mallon, slowly. "It gave you the sort of feeling that you have when a child has asked you a riddle. You don't care twopenny for the answer, and yet you ask what it is."

"Well, you won't get an answer to this!" "If we chose to take the trouble we might. For instance, if I were looking out for a house in the neighbourhood and took a fancy to it, I suppose somebody hereabout could tell me who bought it of the original owner?"

A slight, almost imperceptible change came over Somerville's face, and he dropped the piece of apocryphal, which he was holding on the point of his fork, into his lap.

"It's infernally damp. You would die of rheumatism before a month was out!"

"Somebody lives there—that gaunt old woman who brought the wine—and she isn't a cripple by any means."

"Don't know, never saw her in my life."

"Godfrey!" exclaimed Meta, who did not find the conversation particularly interesting. "How is it that you never told us that Mr. Vere had saved your life?"

"That's such an old story—time to forget it, I've no doubt," opening his heavy eyes and shooting a glance across the table, "some day Vere will be precious sorry that he ever did!"

"When he is," said Nella, with a mischievous smile, feeling obliged to hit anybody or everybody in her present frame of mind. "Perhaps he will get somebody to take you prisoner, and shut you up in Nun's Tower, and then you will be lost for ever!"

The coffee-cup fell from Somerville's hand, smashed to pieces, and dashed the contents over the smooth, white cloth, and Mr. Mallon sprang to his feet apparently without any motive whatever, whilst Cyril never moved a muscle, but offered his table-napkin to wipe up the mess.

A bomb-shell might have produced as satisfactory results.

CHAPTER XXV.

"I think you are hard on her, as I said before," and Mr. Mallon shook his head, as he patted his horse's neck. "Half the women in Blackshire may be wearing red bows at this moment."

"Yes, but they are not likely to drop them

in the arbour at Nun's Tower, nor to be of the same pattern. This ribbon has a little speckle in the border," touching his breast-pocket; "besides, didn't you see that she had lost a bow from the side of her skirt?"

"No, I hadn't studied her as you had, Vere. I know nothing about her," lowering his voice; "but that girl, I could take my oath, is devoted to you."

Cyril shook his close-cropped head. "Not a bit of it. She would do anything for me for the sake of auld lang syne, but that is all. That brute Somerville has bewitched her!"

"She trod on his toes at breakfast." "It was only a random shot; but, I say, you lost your head completely. A child might have found you out."

Mr. Mallon looked ashamed of himself, but at that moment Sir Edward came out and got into the dog-cart. Cyril took his place by his side, Mr. Mallon got upon Buttercup, and Somerville brought up the rear on Pearl.

The house seemed very quiet after their departure, and Meta yawned a good many times over her needlework. Nella was too angry and depressed to be sleepy, but felt thankful for a brief period of rest. When Godfrey was in the house she was obliged to guard over every look and word, and to be armed at all points; now she could say or do anything she liked, and no one would wonder.

With wearying reiteration she asked herself what was the matter with Cyril. The abrupt way in which he had turned from her to Meta, when she asked him that harmless question about the buttons, had slung her to the quick, and really mortified her more than his previous indifference. After the sunshine of yesterday, to put it metaphorically, it was difficult to bear the east wind with anything like serenity.

Lady Somerville brooked upon her reflections. "Mr. Mallon strikes me as a very gentlemanly man, in spite of his personal peculiarities. I cannot help thinking that he has some attraction in the neighbourhood, which he does not care to acknowledge."

"Of what sort, mamma? I hope it is quite proper!"

"Otherwise, I should not have mentioned it. I thought perhaps he had lost his heart to some young lady who is above him in station. Miss Arkwright, for instance."

"I don't think so," objected Nella, "for I saw Cyril introduce him to her yesterday, so they must have been strangers. But you wouldn't call her above him in station?"

"Not exactly, only she is a great heiress."

"Not like Meta, who has no brother."

"But then Meta's fate is settled," with a smile; "and I am thankful for it. With Godfrey for my son-in-law I shall gain a son, and not lose a daughter."

"Don't talk of it, mamma!" Meta said hastily. "I always have a feeling that it won't come off."

"What could prevent it, my dear?" looking quite aghast.

Meta bent over her work. "He might like some one else better."

"Not when he is engaged to you. I never heard such a ridiculous idea. Nella, my dear, I wish you would play us something, music in the morning is so enlivening."

Feeling restless and dissatisfied, Nella complied with alacrity, a wild nocturne of Brahms suiting better with her present mood than needlework. Oh! if she could only fly away on the wings of melody and be at rest—beyond the craving of useless longing—beyond the fear of eternal disappointment! Surely there was some land, however distant, where faith would not be met with the unfaith of doubt—where love in all its joy and blessedness would last more than half a day!

The music seemed to soothe her soul, though her head throbbed distractingly. She scarcely ate any luncheon, but still persisted in imagining that a walk would do her good, in spite of Lady Somerville's entreaties that she would stay at home, and lie down on the sofa.

The carriage drove off punctually at half

past two, but Nella was delayed by the advent of a humble little dressmaker, whom she had employed to make a simple serge costume for the morning; and it was close upon half-past three when she sallied out in her large black hat with its plume of feathers, and long black jacket lined with fur—the gift of Sir Edward.

Not caring much whither she went, she passed through the gate at the end of the shrubbery and took the road to Alverley, walking briskly to keep herself warm.

It was a dull, grey afternoon, with ominous clouds hanging overhead suggestive of snow, and a bitter east wind nipping the tip of her delicate nose. She was under the impression that exercise would do her head good, so struggled on, in spite of a strong inclination to turn back and subside into a comfortable arm-chair in front of a cheerful fire. Also, she was afraid of returning home early, in case it might look as if she had come back on purpose to meet Somerville.

The nearest way to Colonel Deynourt's place—Silcoates—was by a narrow road which skirted the edge of a wood, in quite a different direction from the one she had taken, so she was secure from any chance of being picked up ignominiously by the dog-cart.

Turning many things over in her mind, she came to the conclusion that life was far more interesting than it used to be. Godfrey, by his extraordinary behaviour, saved her from anything like stagnation of thought, and Cyril did his best to keep her in a fever of anxiety.

What the mystery was that surrounded them all she could not imagine, but she made up her mind that Miss Arkwright was at the bottom of it, and had a good deal to answer for. She could not make out if Mr. Mallon were an outsider or a principal, and determined to watch him accordingly.

Her cogitations had engrossed her to such a degree that she went further than she had intended, and it was growing dusk when she suddenly came to the conclusion that she ought to turn back. So far she had met nobody, but now she heard the sound of horses' hoofs galloping on the frosty road; and in a panic of fear, for which she was at a loss to account in her cooler moments, ran to the hedge to hide herself if possible amongst its straggling branches.

She had just crept under a particularly thorny brier when Godfrey Somerville passed, his own face white as death, and the foam flying in snowy flakes from Pearl's mouth.

In spite of the speed at which he was going he caught sight of her, and pulling up as soon as he could, came back to the spot where he had seen her.

"What are you doing there?" he said, roughly.

"And in the scowl of Heaven each face Grew dark as he was speaking."

"I am just going home," a strange feeling of fear making her voice shake, as she felt the sense of mystery growing round her in the dusky light.

"And the first thing you'll do is to blurt out that you've seen me!" Then he sprang from his horse, and seized her by both hands, whilst Pearl stood panting by, too exhausted to think of running away. "Nell, you won't betray me?"

"Let me go this instant!" her spirit rising with her temper.

"Not till you have given me your promise, Nell!" his agitation growing with every instant, as he held her hands in a tightening grip. "I'm a desperate, ruined man, if you say a word. You don't want to bring everything that's horrible on my head. You wouldn't be so mean and spiteful? Promise!"

The road was growing darker as the minutes flew. She looked up into his face, it was working with passion, and its expression frightened her. She was alone with him, without a living creature at hand to help her, and the only wish of her heart was to get away. Without waiting to make conditions, which would have been so infinitely wiser, she said, quickly,—

"Go where you like, I won't tell."

"Heaven bless you!" his voice thick with

excess of feeling; then he released her hands, and she flew down the road as if a mad bull had been in pursuit.

When she stopped to recover her breath she heard the whistle of a train, and wondered if it had been his wish to catch it. If he succeeded, she pined his horse. After that she went home as fast as she could, her nerves having been somewhat upset by this sudden meeting; but when she was safe within the four walls of her own room her head throbbed so madly that she was obliged to throw herself on her bed instead of going down to tea. She could not think, she could only lie still and suffer.

By-and-by Meta came up to look for her, and was very sympathising about her poor head, stopping so kindly to bathe it with eau-de-Cologne and toilet vinegar that Nella would have guessed, if she had not known it, that Somerville had not come in with the rest.

"Don't let me keep you, dear," she groaned, longing to be left in peace.

"Oh! mamma's in no hurry, and only Mr. Vere and papa have come back. I can't tell what can be keeping the others. Papa says that Godfrey left the Deyncourts quite early—he thought perhaps, till he found that Pearl was not in the stables, that he had gone out for a walk with you."

"My dear, I'm not you. Go down, please," tried to the very limit of patience.

"I'll send you up a cup of tea with some lemon-juice in it; Godfrey always takes that when he has a headache." With this conclusive argument in favour of the remedy, she left the room, and Nella turned her face from the light with an impatient sigh.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEAD leaves lying under foot, naked branches stretching out their arms to the leaden clouds above, and a cold, east wind searching out the hidden corners, and yet Dulcie Arkwright left the roaring fire in the library, on which the footman had just piled some fresh logs of wood, and, shrouded in a large cloak lined with sable, came tripping down the shrubbery, with a happy smile on her lips, a joyous light in her eyes, looking furtively from side to side, till a tall form came from under an arch of ivy, and then with a breathless sigh of joy she hid her blushes on his breast.

There was no need for words between them; tried and tempered by the fire of adversity there was no doubt to raise a barrier—each knew the depth of feeling in the other's heart. A long pause, whilst the sky grew dark and the wind blew, and both cold and darkness were nothing to either.

A long pause, and then the woman, as usual, spoke first. "Any news?"

He shook his head dejectedly. "None, and yet for hours we prowled about the place, listening to every sound, watching every door and window."

"And you saw nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing till four o'clock, when a lamp was lighted by that woman whom we saw the other day. I could see her distinctly standing by the table in the room above the door. Then she came to the window, and drew down the blind. Of course we were looking with all our eyes—this was after Vere came back from seeing you—and presently a shadow, which I believe was *hers*, came across the blind."

"You think so really?" her heart beating fast.

"I do, but it is ages since I last saw her, and she had her hair hanging down."

"How very strange! But what next?"

"After that the shutters were shut, and as there was not a single chink by which I could see through them—though I climbed on to the portico, and rubbed my nose against the glass—we came away."

"And what will you do next?"

"You will laugh," smoothing her hair fondly and reverently with his fingers. "I was thinking of trying the peilar dodge—that is,

borrowing a pack from some itinerant dealer, and forcing my way in through a woman's love of finery."

"I think you might as well try it on the stones in the road. That woman has nothing soft about her."

"Do you call vanity soft? It has made some women very cruel—Queen Bess, for instance."

"Yes, but Prendergast is made of stone. I don't believe she has a feeling to work upon."

"If our suspicions are correct, she must be very faithful to Somerville."

"Or he has a hold upon her—that is much more likely. Probably she has committed some crime, and he has promised not to tell."

"What a horrible thought! It doesn't sound like you, Dulcie," looking down at her beautiful face with a tender smile.

"I have had nothing but horrible thoughts for years. Don't look so sad," interrupting herself hastily. "I shan't remember them when the bright days come."

"What I have cost you?" his brows contracting as if in pain.

"What you will bring me!" with a rapturous smile. "Oh, Victor, I shall never want to die when we are together."

"We must arrange to do it together or not at all; but I mustn't keep you out in the cold."

"I don't mind it a bit. Shall you go there again on your way home?"

"I suppose so, though it will be no use. What a capital fellow Vere is; I owe him everything!"

"You don't know what he has been to me! Mother—with a little laugh—"thought it was getting serious."

"And you?" with a searching glance into the depths of her hazel eyes.

"I should have liked a stable-boy if he had brought me news of you."

"It would have been better for you—a thousand times better—if you had chosen him instead of me," feeling acutely all the misery he had brought on her young life—a life that promised so fairly till he threw a blight across it.

"It might have been better if I had been born a different girl, with a different name and a different nature, but for Dulcie Arkwright there was no other choice possible. Oh, Victor!" with sudden passion, "do you think I could have cared for anyone else, when I had once seen you?"

His lip quivered, as he drew her nearer to him.

"I was the most miserable dog upon earth—and you were sorry for me."

"But you were happy when I first saw you!" looking up into his face with a smile. "Do you remember that haymaking at Somerville Hall, when they nearly carried us away with a haycock, and Sir Edward only just stopped them in time? Do you remember the dance in the evening, when you made me behave so shockingly?"

"I know. I wouldn't let you dance with anyone but me."

"Don't talk of it, dear!"—with a frown of pain—"the present seems like a nightmare."

"But it will come back, and we shall be quite crazed with happiness, because we can go about just like other people; I shall be so proud then—the proudest girl in England."

"Proud of what?" looking down at her sweet face, with intense tenderness.

"Proud of you!" clasping his hand in both her own; "proud to think you've been through so much, and borne it so well."

"Not much to boast of—I've taken it out in grumbling. But I must not keep you, dear," with a sigh, for he felt it was almost impossible to tear himself away. "Good-bye, and Heaven take care of you, for I can't!"

A long, silent kiss, a murmured "til Tuesday," and then, with a wave of her small, white hand, she fled down the darkening shrubbery, and Victor stood still with folded arms watching her disappear, as a man who sees the sun set on his joy.

When there was no longer a trace of her to

be seen he made his way through the kitchen-garden to a door at the bottom, which Dulcie had taken care to see was unlocked. Buttercup, whom he had tied to a railing which surrounded a spinney, neighed loudly, as he came up.

Alarmed lest the sound should attract attention, he mounted in a hurry, and put him at the hedge which separated that bit of grass-land from the road. To his dismay, he alighted almost on the top of Jack Arkwright, who was coming along with his gun over his shoulder, and a couple of dogs at his heels.

Jack started back in immense surprise.

"Halloa! look out! What the deuce have you been after?" looking suspiciously over the hedge.

"Caught in the act!" and Mr. Mallon smiled. Primed with an excuse by Cyril, he brought it forth with ready self-possession, the fear of Dulcie's being compromised keeping his wits alive. "This is the shortest way, isn't it? I have just been leaving a message at your place. Some address that Vere promised your sister, I think."

"Ah, I daresay; something about Tuesday—the music, the ices, or the floor. I should like to cut the whole thing. Come back and have a smoke?" patting Buttercup's neck.

"Must get home, thanks. See you I suppose at Copplestone?"

"Yes, if I've anything decent to carry me. I've been unlucky lately with my hunters. That's a good horse of yours," eyeing his points with the air of a 'vet.' "What would you take for him?"

"He's too odd a friend to part with." Then with a friendly nod he rode on, whilst Jack went homewards at a leisurely pace.

Turning to the left, instead of the right, which would have led him past the Red Ploughshare, Mr. Mallon cantered briskly along the road until he came within sight of the dark foliage of the evergreen oaks which surrounded Nan's Tower. Then he checked Buttercup's eager desire for his stables, and rode slowly along the fence, and standing up in his stirrups every now and then to peer over the yew-hedge.

There was nothing to be seen but darkness—impenetrable darkness—unrelieved by the smallest ray of light. When he reached the gate, he was surprised to find it wide open. He rode in, rather expecting to meet Somerville in the drive; but there was no sound, except the creaking of the branches as they swayed to and fro in the east wind.

Presently he dismounted, for the sake of prudence, and led his horse cautiously into the shadows, where he left him tied up under an oak.

Then he walked up the drive to the house, taking care to keep on the grass, lest the sound of his footsteps might penetrate to an unseen ear.

It was lighter in front of the Tower, where the trees fell back in a sort of semicircle, and he looked round to see if there were any trace of Somerville's presence. But the place seemed quite desolate. As his eye travelled slowly over the front of the weird-looking building, there was no sign of a single living creature within it—not a ray of light penetrated from the windows, though the shutters were not shut, or the blinds drawn. The place seemed given over to damp and solitude, a fitting spot to be haunted by ghosts or connected with a legend of crime.

Victor shivered, then shook himself as if to throw off the oppression of the dark, mysterious stillness, and walked across the soaking grass to the portico. He tried the handle of the door, and, to his surprise, the door was not locked. Then, for the first time, as he stepped unhindered into the hitherto jealously guarded hall, a fear crossed his mind that Somerville had outwitted him, and carried Robins off.

What a fool he had been to wait and dawdle about, instead of sending a couple of detectives to watch the house night and day. Then, at least, he might have had the satis-

faction of knowing who went, and where they had gone. Now he was as completely in the dark as he was before. Vere ever suggested to him that Nun's Tower might hold the secret on which depended the happiness of his life, as well as that life itself.

With the gloomiest of forebodings gathering round him he went into a small room on the ground-floor, where was some meal, either luncheon or dinner, lying untasted, and quite cold on the table. There was a dish of mutton cutlets, the gravy turned into solid fat; a simple pudding, a pot of jam, a bottle of sherry, and a loaf of bread with a knife left in it, as if some one had been called away when in the act of cutting it. The fire was almost out, and a chair was lying on its back on the floor.

Mr. Mallon looked from the loaf to the chair, and decided that Mrs. Prendergast had been called away in a hurry—she had thrown down the loaf without finishing the slice—she had knocked down the chair without waiting to pick it up. But why?

Had there been some dreadful tragedy? Had the poor girl, maddened by her wretched life, resolved to put an end to it?

In the excited state of his imagination he could easily conjure up the scene—the cry breaking the stillness—the rush upstairs—and then, his blood froze as he followed, in fancy, and saw the poor little Robin with broken wings, senseless, shattered, and still!

"Gone to the God who gave her that life of sorrow and pain,
Gone to ask for another that might turn her loss to gain."

He had lighted a cigar-light to examine the contents of the room, and he lit a second as he groped his way along the hall to the stone stairs. Its tiny little ray seemed rather to increase than to diminish the darkness, and every hair on his body stood erect, as he peered into the corners, fearing a horror at every step!

(To be continued.)

REDEEMED BY FATE.

CHAPTER XIV.

MEANWHILE, pleasant companion as Philip was—and she had danced with him principally because he seemed lonely, and knew no one else—Muriel was very much regretting having engaged herself for the cotillion, for instead of enjoying the dance her eyes were constantly roving about the room in search of her husband and Sybil, and bitter was her disappointment when she failed to see them enter.

Had not Philip himself been engaged in watching Haidée and Sir Jasper, he must have observed his partner's preoccupation; but, as it was, it escaped his notice.

"Shall I get you an ice?" he said, when the set was over and he led her to a seat in a window recess, where lace draperies shut her out from observation, and the night air blew coolly and refreshingly in through the open casement.

"If you please!" she answered; and then he went away, and Lady Urwicke's thoughts wandered off to those few minutes when she had stood in the starlight by her husband's side, while a happy smile parted her scarlet lips.

Presently she heard her own name mentioned, and started up, intending to make her presence known to the little knot of gentlemen who had gathered outside the recess; but before she could put her resolve in execution her ear caught words that seemed to take all volition from her.

"It's really too bad of Urwicke," said Captain Wildair; "he has been sitting out on the terrace with Miss Ruthven for the last half-hour, and a moment's thought would convince him of the folly of giving people's tongues such food for scandal!"

"Downright insult to that charming wife of

his, I call it!" put in another voice. "I wonder she stands it so quietly!"

"Perhaps she knows nothing about his former liaison with the fair Sybil!" suggested some one else.

"Oh, yes! You may be sure there have been plenty of kind friends to enlighten her on a subject that was the talk of the whole county. Everyone knows how devoted he used to be to Miss Ruthven, and that he would have married her if his debts had not prevented it."

"Then I suppose the attraction of the present Lady Urwicke was her money?"

"Certainly, that's the reason Urwicke made her his wife! But be that as it may, she is thoroughbred to the backbone, and he ought to treat her with proper respect—which certainly does not consist in flirting with Miss Ruthven!"

"I wonder she has not more prudence!"

The only answer to this remark was a shrug, very significant of the estimation in which Sybil was held; and then the trio moved away, leaving in the recess an anguished, white-faced woman, whose heart was crying out in wild appeal to Heaven against the hardness of her fate.

So it was Sybil Cland had loved—nay, loved still; and all the softening in his manner, the interest he was beginning to manifest in her, was nothing but a fancy born of her own vanity.

True, she herself had been aware of the motive for which Urwicke had married her, but it was none the less bitterly humiliating to hear it spoken of, and to know it was common talk for all the county.

She could have cried aloud in her wounded spirit, her bitter mortification; but pride came to her aid, and she rose up, drawing her graceful figure to its full height, while her eyes flashed and her lips curled in haughtiest scorn.

"I will be no coward for them to triumph over me and glory in my pain!" she said to herself, resolutely. "They shall never know that I care, or that a two-edged sword thrust in my bosom would have been less terrible than this!"

She came out of the recess and met Philip with the ice in his hand. Her cheeks were flushed red as a pomegranate flower, and the face of Haidée herself was not wreathed with more radiant smiles.

"I have changed my mind—I don't want the ice," she said, gaily; "but if you will give me your arm we will go out on the terrace and promenade for a while."

He immediately offered it, and just as they were leaving the ball-room they met Lord Urwicke and Sybil coming in.

Muriel affected not to notice them, and continued her laughing conversation with Philip; but a dark frown came on the brow of the Viscount, who, after conducting Sybil to a seat, followed his wife out.

"Muriel, can I speak with you a minute?"

"Is it anything particular?" she asked, carelessly, and apparently not inclined to put an end to her *little-à-little*. "Will it not do by-and-by?"

"It is something particular, and it will not do by-and-by!" he said, sternly; and Philip, wondering at the tone in which the words were spoken, resigned the lady's arm and retired, so as to be out of earshot.

"Well!" said Muriel, interrogatively, but in a very uninterested voice, as she busied herself with the fastening of one of her bracelets.

"Do you know you are making yourself conspicuous by your imprudent conduct?" exclaimed Claud, not finding his task such an easy one as he had anticipated, now that he was face to face with the delinquent.

"My imprudent conduct!" opening her eyes, and laughing, "I don't know what you mean." "You have danced three times with Mr. Greville."

"Well, and suppose I had danced thirteen times with him—what then?"

"What then! I wonder you have not more use of propriety than to ask such a question."

Why, you will have the whole neighbourhood talking of you!"

"In that case the worst it could say would be that you and I were well matched," she answered, with a delicate satire that stung him all the more because it was uttered with such tranquil indifference.

He bit his lip, and frowned.

"Is that all you wanted me for?" she added, after a slight pause. "If so, permit me to tell you it was hardly important enough to warrant the interruption of such a pleasant conversation as mine with Mr. Greville."

"Really, your partiality for that young man is surprising. No doubt, though, you find a similarity of tastes," said the Viscount, with a sneer; "but, for all that, I must remind you of a fact you have apparently forgotten, namely, that you have a position to keep up, and that the name you bear has certain responsibilities."

"I am not likely to forget it—no more likely than a slave is to forget the chains that bind her," she replied, very bitterly. "This is the badge of my serfdom"—throwing out her left hand, and pointing to the broad band of gold on the third finger.

Lord Urwicke stared at her in amazement.

Was this the quiet, reserved creature he had married—the calm, icy woman who had sat at the head of his table, never contradicting one of his mandates, never troubling him with complaints or recriminations? Why, she looked a very empress, whose majesty has been insulted; and instead of the humble penitent he had expected to see, murmuring her regrets at having committed an unwitting breach of the laws of society, he found she did not even condescend to take so much notice of his rebuke as to reply to it—she let it pass in contemptuous silence, while she threw in his face the fact of her marriage being hateful to her!

What had caused the change, and given her such courage?

He was silent, for the simple reason that he was too dumbfounded to know what to say; and Muriel, with a mocking bow, turned away, the silks and laces of her dress sweeping past him on the marbles of the terrace, while she beckoned Philip towards her, and returned on his arm to the ball-room.

Lord Urwicke paced up and down, more agitated than he had been for many a long day.

"And I fancied she cared for me!" he muttered, and then stood still, while the small still voice of conscience whispered in his ear.

"Well, and suppose she did care for you, how have you repaid her? By a scornful indifference, a systematic neglect. What have you given her in return for her old girlish freedom of thought and action? An empty title for which she cares nothing. Is it then wonderful that she should find solace in the attentions of another man?"

"She knew him, and perhaps cared for him before our marriage," he muttered, fiercely, recalling their adieu at South Kensington, which his own presence had interrupted, and the fact that it was through her influence Philip was now here. "Well, I will wait and see what time brings forth, and if I find they are lovers—"

He was not quite clear what would be the result, but a hot hatred of Philip began to grow up in his heart, and he tried in vain to check it. He went indoors, but did not dance again that night, except once with Sybil.

On all sides he heard praises of his wife, who had contrived, without any effort, on her own part, to become the rage, which means much more than saying she was merely a beauty. Certainly her looks did not betray any unhappiness, for of the gay she was the gayest, laughter sparkled in her eyes and on her lips, and her movements were the lightest and most buoyant of all the guests who honoured Sir Jasper that night with their presence!

"Is not this a delightful evening?" mur-

mured Haidée to Philip, between the pauses of their valse, "I have so enjoyed it."

"It's more than I have then," answered the young man; "for if it had not been for Lady Urwick, who took pity on me, I should have been left out in the cold—to find my own level, I suppose!"

"Don't speak so bitterly, Philip."

"Is it not enough to make me feel bitter, when I see you engrossed by Sir Jasper, and half-a-dozen others, while I dare not approach within a hundred yards of you?"

"You are somewhere within that distance now, at all events," said Haidée, somewhat sardonically, and thinking that perhaps her lover had some small cause of complaint.

"Yes; but this is the first dance I have had with you to-night, and I suppose it will be the last."

"Never mind!" consolingly, "I'll meet you in the china gallery to-morrow night, and then we'll have a long, long talk to make up for this disappointment. By-the-by, have you come across any traces of those papers yet?"

"No; and the matter remains as great a mystery as ever," said Philip, his brow clouding. "I told Sir Jasper all about it, and asked him if he could throw any light on it; but he said no, and was as much puzzled as I myself. He gave me leave to question the servants, but they all accounted for themselves in a way that was perfectly satisfactory."

"It is strange!" murmured the girl.

"It is more than strange—it is bewildering. And yet, do you know, Haidée, I have a strange idea—I dare say you will laugh at it as an idle fancy—that the secret of my birth is somehow connected with this place!"

Haidée did not laugh, but she opened her eyes in wide astonishment.

"And instead of being discouraged by the loss of those letters, I am the more determined to persevere in my efforts to discover who my parents really were," went on the young man.

"To-morrow I am going to an auction in London, in order to buy a picture Sir Jasper is anxious to have; and I shall take the opportunity of calling on an old friend of mine, who is a barrister. I intend telling him the whole of my history, and asking his advice as to what steps I had better take. Of course I can afterwards exercise my own judgment with regard to following his counsel."

"What counsel, my young Raphael?" said Sir Jasper, lightly, as he came up behind them, and offered his arm to Haidée. "I fear I must deprive you of Miss Darrell's society, Greville, for supper is served, and I am to have the honour of taking her down."

CHAPTER XV.

DURING the night a change took place in the weather, and morning was ushered in by cloudy skies, and a soft warm drizzle of fine rain. A dog-cart was brought round to the door of Heathcliff Priors before breakfast, and Philip jumped in and drove off to the station, for the sale of which he had spoken was to begin in good time, and the picture Sir Jasper wanted was set down early in the catalogue.

On reaching the auction rooms where the collection was exhibited he could not restrain a feeling of surprise, for none of the pictures were by any means valuable; and the particular one mentioned by the baronet was of such decided mediocrity that Philip wondered whether it would fetch the cost of his journey!

However, it was not his place to dictate to his patron, so he bought the painting at a low price, paid for it by filling up the blank cheque Sir Jasper had given him, and then took a hansom and drove to Fleet-street, where he got out, and began the ascent of the many steps that led to his legal friend's chambers in Smith's-buildings, Temple.

Mr. Robert Pierson, barrister-at-law, was at home, and received his visitor very cordially. He was a tall, rather slight man, of middle age, with curly hair, worn bald at the

forehead, and a wide, determined brow. When he spoke his voice was remarkably clear and incisive, and gave you the impression of his words, being well-weighted, and worthy of attention.

"What a long time it is since I saw you!" he exclaimed. "I have been wondering where the dickens you had hidden yourself."

Thereupon Philip gave a slight sketch of the various adventures that had befallen him since Mrs. Maxwell's death—excepting his relations with Haidée—and, in conclusion, detailed the mysterious disappearance of the papers on which he laid so much importance.

"Curious—very!" remarked Pierson, leaning his head on his hand, and regarding Philip thoughtfully. "I suppose you are sure you put them in the desk?"

"Positive!"

"And the desk was locked?"

"Yes."

"And have you any reason to suppose your papers were tampered with before, or have been since?"

"To the best of my belief not. However, finding the lock of the desk must have been forced with a skeleton key, I took the precaution afterwards of putting all papers and a diary away in a metal box that, it would be a matter of some difficulty to open."

"A very wise proceeding. Now, can you say positively whether the figure you saw was that of a man or woman?"

Philip hesitated.

"It was that of a tall person wrapped in a cloak, and it seemed to me like a man, but the darkness may possibly have deceived me."

"Because," added Pierson, "if you are convinced it was none of the servants, we have the inquiry narrowed into a radius embracing only three persons—Sir Jasper, his sister, and their guest."

"It was not the latter, because I had just parted from her," said Philip, hastily; "and Miss Ruthven, I have every reason to believe, was in her room."

"Then Sir Jasper was undoubtedly the intruder!"

Philip started and was silent. Strangely enough the idea had not occurred to him, but nevertheless it took a strong hold on his imagination.

"Sir Jasper has always struck me as being a man with a secret," he said, at last, slowly. "He is studiously silent with regard to his past life, and I confess I have often wished to know something about it."

"Nothing easier," remarked the barrister. "There are ways of getting at the history of all such men as Sir Jasper Ruthven, and I will undertake to send you a written account of his early life within seven days."

"But would it be honourable to allow you to do so?"

"Certainly. There is no necessity for any knowledge you may attain to go further, or to injure the baronet, therefore there can be nothing wrong in it. You simply do it as a means of throwing light on an occurrence that concerns you, and has taken place beneath his roof—the motive fully justifies the means."

"Still," observed Philip, "it seems taking a great deal of trouble, and a very roundabout way of elucidating a trifle."

The barrister smiled.

"My dear Greville, in the legal profession—and you know I was brought up as a solicitor before being called to the bar—we are accustomed to attach great importance to what you are pleased to call 'trifles.' It is the 'trifles' that give us the first clue—'trifles' that aid in following it out—'trifles' that one by one are brought together in the chain of circumstantial evidence, until a pile of proof is built up strong enough to send a man to the gallows. Perhaps out of this very trifle you may be put on the track of the discovery you are so anxious to make regarding your own parentage. And that reminds me of a coincidence in your narrative that struck me as peculiar; but in order to explain it I must give you a few preliminary particulars."

He opened the desk on the writing-table before him, and took from it a letter, which he glanced over before speaking again.

"This," he said, "is from a man in Australia named Seaforth, who has been out there nearly thirty years, and has contrived to amass a very good fortune. It seems he married and had two children. His wife, however, died, many years ago, and last autumn his children caught a fever, which, in both cases, had a fatal termination. After this sad occurrence he resolved to return to England, and has been occupied in selling his farms, stock, &c., and his trouble is now to find an heir to the money he has accumulated. When he quitted England he had one sister, of whom he was very fond, and whom he left under the care of an aunt. The name of this girl was Grace, and she was supposed to be very pretty; at all events, she ran away from her home, to be married, presumably, but the companion of her flight was never discovered. She wrote one letter to her brother, saying she was well and happy, and that a child had been born to her, and that was all the news that Matthew Seaforth ever received; for she gave no address, and he was then moving about from place to place, so that, even supposing she had written, the letter would probably not have reached him. The aunt, in the meantime died; and so for all these years, Seaforth has ceased communicating with his family; but now that he has lost his own children he is anxious to discover whether his sister's are living, and has written to me to make inquiries and spare no expense in the matter. It seems a hopeless chance with so little by way of clue; nevertheless, I don't despair of success; and I should be very glad to obtain it, for Seaforth once did a very good turn to a brother of mine who was in the Bush, and it is owing to that he has entrusted his business to me. I dare say you are surprised I have troubled you with all these details, but now I will tell you the reason. The place where Grace Seaforth died from was the village of Heathcliff, the date of her flight was about twelve months before your own birth."

Greville, who had been listening with close attention, started up, very pale and agitated, and laid his hand on the barrister's arm.

"And do you think—?" he commenced, and then stopped, unable to continue.

"Do I think you are that child?" said Mr. Pierson. "No; it would be premature to say that I did. I simply see a curious coincidence which I deem it worth while investigating, but until some more light is thrown on the subject it would be the height of folly to identify you with Seaforth's nephew. However, I will lose no time in setting inquiries afoot, and, moreover, Seaforth himself will be in England before very long, and then we shall hear what he has to say."

Just then a clerk entered with a card in his hand, which he gave to his employer, who rose hurriedly.

"I fear I must dismiss you, now, Greville," he said, holding out his hand, "for a client is here whose time is limited, and whose business is important. You may trust me to do all I can to help you, and before long you shall hear what progress I have made; and if any new discovery has come to light. One warning before we part—be cautious, and keep a silent tongue in your head!"

Philip nodded and took his departure, ruminating, as he walked up the Strand, on what he had just heard. Could it be possible there was any connection between him and this Matthew Seaforth? Or was it all a fancy-born of Pierson's imagination—a romance woven from the very slenderest materials, and destined to end in nothing?

The young man's head began to ache, and suddenly bethinking himself of the necessity of getting some dinner, he turned into a restaurant and ordered a chop, and then sat down near the window and idly watched the busy stream of life as it passed up and down before him.

All at once his careless glance changed to

one of close eagerness; his attention had been attracted by the tall figure of a woman, which, draped from head to heel in a long, black cloak, went rapidly by. Surely he recognized the contour of the form in spite of its shrouding drapery?

Snatching up his hat he hurried out, and saw the lady turn quickly up a side street, and presently disappear within a small shop where all kinds of eastern curiosities were exhibited in the window, and as she did so he caught a glimpse of her face, which, closely veiled as it was, he yet immediately recognized as that of Sybil Ruthven.

"Strange!" he muttered. "What brings her here, alone, and dressed in such an out-of-the-way fashion?"

He waited for about half-an-hour, and when he saw her come out was staring in a window a few doors above. She did not observe him, and before he could get to her had hailed a hansom and sprang lightly in, so Philip went back to his chop, with his musings turned in a new direction by this last adventure.

His train did not start until five o'clock, and in the interval he collected some photographs for Haidée, thinking to himself the while that he must inevitably meet Sybil at Paddington—at least, if she intended getting home that night. When he got to the station he looked eagerly round and scrutinized every woman who passed, but Miss Ruthven was not amongst them.

"There is not a train for Heathcliff between the 1.50 and this, is there?" he asked a porter, as he got into a smoking carriage, and proceeded to light a cigar.

"Well, sir, not as a rule, but to-day there was an excursion to Manay, and you can easily get on to Heathcliff from there."

"And what time did that leave?"

"Three-fifty, sir."

Then, Philip decided, this was the one by which Sybil must have gone. When he reached the Priors, and had washed his hands and changed his coat—an operation very necessary after the London smoke and "blacks"—he went to the drawing-room, where he found the whole party assembled, Sybil included. She was seated at the piano idly turning over some music.

"So you have been to London to-day, Mr. Greville," she observed, pausing, with a song in her hand; "have you brought us any news back?"

"None," he answered, understanding at once that, unaware of his having seen her, she desired to keep secret her own visit to the metropolis.

"I have travelled to-day, too," she went on; "I went to Manay to spend the day with a friend there, and didn't get back till dinner-time."

Philip made no remark, and Sybil sat down to the piano and beckoned Lord Urwicke to her side.

"You must turn over the music for me," she said, smiling, "and then I will sing your favourite song, 'For Ever!'"

In a full, deep contralto she gave it, and Muriel, who was watching, felt her heart stung in despair, as she observed that Sybil attempted no disguise of the fact that she was singing wholly and solely for Claud's benefit.

"I think of all thou art to me,
I dream of what thou canst not be,
My life is crossed with thoughts of thee,
For ever and for ever."

Perchance if we had never met,
I had been spared this sad regret,
This constant striving to forget,
For ever and for ever.

Ah! no, I could not bear the pain,
Of never seeing thee again;
I cling to thee with might and main
For ever and for ever.

The words seemed so strangely appropriate to the situation that the singer might have improvised them herself. Even Claud seemed to feel it was not by chance she had made her selection, and a deep flush rose to his brow as she finished.

He had not been near his wife all the even-

ing, but had been discussing the various improvements to be effected in the rebuilding of the Towers with Sybil, who knew a good deal of architecture, and was helping him to decide on different plans.

"Don't you sing, Lady Urwicke?" asked Sybil, as she rose from the music stool amid a dead silence, and caught a frowning glance from Sir Jasper, who did not approve of his sister's reckless behaviour.

"Oh, yes."

Miss Ruthven was surprised at the answer, which she had felt sure would be a negative.

"Then do go to the piano," murmured Haidée, and Muriel rose at once to comply with the request. Her voice was as good as Sybil's own, and even better trained; moreover she sang with a purity of expression that the baronet's sister lacked, and—perhaps with a very natural feminine desire to outshine her rival—she exerted herself to her utmost in the "Casta Diva."

"Why you are a very Patti!" exclaimed Sir Jasper, "I had no idea, Urwicke"—turning to the Viscount—"your wife was such an accomplished vocalist."

"Nor I either," responded Claud, to whom the song was a revelation. "How is it you hide your lights under a bushel, Muriel?"

"Because I have hitherto had no interest in displaying them," she answered, with a curling lip, and little imagining what interpretation he would put on the words. A little later the party broke up and retired, the ladies and Sir Jasper to their several sleeping apartments, Lord Urwicke to the smoking-room.

As soon as she thought the coast was clear, Haidée slipped out to keep her appointment with Philip, who deemed it wiser not to acquaint her with the story Elson had related, for fear—as was most probable—it should end in nothing.

"Do you know," said Haidée, "a funny thing happened to-day? As I was walking along the corridor I saw Sir Jasper coming out of your room!"

This intelligence confirmed Philip in an idea that had previously suggested itself, namely, that the baronet had had another and stronger motive for sending him to London than the desire to possess a really valuable picture.

He had wished for some reason to get him away, and had doubtless taken advantage of his absence to make a more searching examination of his various belongings.

He said nothing, however, to Haidée of his suspicions, and presently she prepared to go.

"Good-night, my little love!" said Philip, pressing his lips fondly on hers, as he held her folded in a close embrace. "I have a strange sort of presentiment about you, Haidée—it seems to me as if the 'good-bye' I am now uttering were destined to be a final one!"

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed, with a sweet, low laugh. "You do not fear my faith, surely?"

"No! I believe you to be loyal and true!"

"What, then, can come between us?"

"The force of circumstances," he answered, almost solemnly. "I used to think with Tennyson, that 'Man was man and master of his fate,' but the last few weeks have taught me differently, and now I know that the strongest thing in life—the one against which there is no rebelling—is destiny!"

"You frighten me!" she said, with a little shiver, creeping closer to him. "I know our love is beset with difficulties, and that it will be very difficult to gain papa's consent, but for all that I do not see what can separate us. Nothing in the world will change my constancy!"

The young artist sighed.

"That may be, but still I can't help feeling despondent to-night. You know"—forcing a smile—"how much moods come over one sometimes, and how hard they are to shake off."

"Poor Philip! he is tired with his journey, and nasty, smoky London!" exclaimed Haidée, rubbing her face caressingly against his, like a soft, white kitten, and not attempting any-

thing verbal, in the belief that this form of consolation would be most effectual.

Perhaps it was. At any rate, Philip caught her to him, and as soon as he released her she sped swiftly and lightly out of the recess, and was half-way along the passage when a dark figure stepped out from behind the bronze statue, and laid a heavy hand on her arm.

CHAPTER XVI.

HAIDÉE could not see in the darkness who her assailant was, but her fears immediately fixed on Sir Jasper, and like a flash of lightning came the thought of what the consequences would be should he discover her relations with Philip.

Luckily the recess was dark, but she remembered that while she stood with her back to the passage all the light there was had concentrated itself on her lover's face.

For a few seconds she stood perfectly still, then, with a sudden wrench, she twisted her arm from her captor's grasp, and with the swiftness of a young chamois flew down the corridor, and seeing Lady Urwicke's dressing-room door ajar rushed in and bolted it behind her.

Muriel, who had exchanged her evening dress for a *robe de chambre*, was sitting in an arm-chair at the window, looking out on the balcony that ran along the side of the house. She started up in alarm at this intrusion on her privacy, and her surprise was not lessened when she saw who her visitor was.

"Dear Lady Urwicke, let me stay here a few minutes!" entreated Haidée, clinging to her, white and trembling. "I will explain everything directly, but if anyone comes to the door don't let them in!"

Her fears were groundless, no one came; and presently Muriel, who could conceive no adequate reason for her companion's agitation, knelt at her side and took her hand.

"What is the matter, my little Haidée? How you tremble!"

"I was so frightened," sobbed the girl, hiding her face on the Viscountess's shoulder. "I thought perhaps he would pursue me in here."

"He—who do you mean?"

"Sir Jasper Ruthven."

"But why should you be afraid of him?"

"I will tell you exactly how I am placed," exclaimed Haidée, with a burst of confidence; and then she narrated the few details of Philip's courtship, ending with a confession of their meetings in the recess.

Lady Urwicke remained silent for a little while, her hand wandering lovingly through the soft ripples of Haidée's golden hair. The girl was so young, and fair, and tender, that she hesitated to say anything that might wound her, and yet for her own good it seemed necessary.

"My dear little Haidée, do you think it was quite prudent to meet Mr. Greville as you have done?"

Haidée opened her innocent blue eyes.

"It never struck me to think whether it was prudent or not," she said, and the Viscountess could not forbear a smile at the naivete of the reply; "but if you disapprove of it, why—"

"I did not say that," Muriel interposed, gently; "but if you were to be seen by—Miss Ruthven, for example—unpleasant things might be said."

Haidée was quiet for a few minutes, her azure eyes clouded over with tears, her red lips quivering.

"Dear Lady Urwicke, you are so good and sweet that it seems to me whatever you say must be right!" she exclaimed at length, impetuously. "Well, I will not meet Philip again"—conquering her tears by a great effort—"but trust to the future to make everything come right."

Muriel kissed her, and when she had gone away stood on the balcony, gazing up at the quiet stars, and thinking to herself what a wonderful thing was this love, whose sweetness she would never taste!



["DEAR LADY URWICKE, LET ME STAY HERE A FEW MINUTES!" ENTREATED HAIDÉE, WHITE AND TREMBLING.]

She little imagined in what manner she herself was to suffer by Haidée's adventure, for he who had caught hold of her was not Sir Jasper, but Lord Urwicke. He had been coming up from the smoking-room on his way to bed, when he saw the two shadowy figures in the recess, and recognized the one as Philip Greville, while the other seemed like that of his wife. He was in his slippers, so they did not hear him, and thus he had leisure to watch their parting, trembling the while with rage and disgust at its tenderness.

When Haidée passed him he could not resist the temptation of making his suspicious certainties, but, as we have seen, she contrived to elude him, and as he saw her disappear within his wife's room, the last shred of doubt as to her identity vanished, and he told himself there could no longer be any question about the artist being her lover.

Should he go and confront her—accuse her of her duplicity, and see if she had anything to say in extenuation?

No, under present circumstances, he decided it would be better not; for, at any rate, he must spare a public scandal so long as he remained the guest of Sir Jasper Ruthven; afterwards—well, afterwards, he and his wife would come to some arrangement for a judicial separation, and would no longer torment each other with the constant remembrance of their unhappy union.

Thus thinking, Lord Urwicke proceeded to the dressing-room, where a bed had been put up for him, and tossed about, restless and miserable, until he paid the price of fatigue, and slumber claimed him as its own.

The next morning Philip breakfasted alone in his room, but was too much occupied in his own thoughts to do justice to the coffee and ham and eggs placed before him. After a very slight repast he descended to the library, a large, oak-wainscoted apartment, lined with book-shelves, and furnished in antique oak and russet leather. There, to his surprise, he found Miss Ruthven, sitting in front of a

ponderous volume, from which she was copying into a little pocket-diary lying at the side. She hastily closed the book as he entered, and her pale face grew a shade redder.

"You are naturally astonished to find me a book-worm," she observed, with a slight laugh, and rising as she spoke. "I confess it is not often the mania for study seizes me; but this morning the library seemed cooler and more inviting than any other place."

"Pray don't let me disturb you," said Philip, courteously, and making a movement of withdrawal.

"I have finished my reading, and am going to get ready to drive over to the Towers with Lord Urwicke, so you need not go away on my account."

As she ceased speaking she took up her book and drew forward the ladder to enable her to put it in its place, which was on the top shelf.

"Allow me!" exclaimed Philip, coming forward; but she declined his assistance, and mounted the steps to replace it herself.

"After all, books are for the old, not for the young," she said, gaily, and with a ringing laugh as she regained *terra firma*; "except novels, of course—and it is a mistake to waste too much time over them. One's own real life is so infinitely more interesting than the fictitious lives of other people."

She had of late quite changed her manner to the young artist, and in lieu of the cold indifference that had formerly characterized it she now evinced the utmost consideration. She took every opportunity of including him in their parties, and often asked him to join them at dinner, when Sir Jasper himself, if consulted beforehand, might have objected.

The young man, of course, did not guess that the reason of this was the desire to throw him and Lady Urwicke together, and by means of their friendship convince the Viscount that his wife was untrue to him; but for all that he neither liked, or trusted Sybil Ruthven. There were in her character elements of repul-

sion that unconsciously made their influence felt in his intercourse with her.

"By-the-bye," she said, as if struck by a sudden thought, when she was leaving the room, "Lady Urwicke and Miss Darrell are playing tennis. Can't you spare time to go out and join them?"

Philip hesitated. The temptation was a very great one.

"At all events, I'll tell them you will play two or three sets after luncheon," added Sybil quietly; and before he could reply she had quitted the room, and he was left to fulfil the purpose for which he had come, i.e., that of finding a "Baronetage," and looking up the chronicles of the Ruthven family.

But whether the book in question was not there, or whether it escaped his notice, cannot be said; anyhow, he could not find it, and at last gave up the search as futile.

Curiosity induced him to glance at the volume he had seen in Miss Ruthven's hand, and whose place on the shelf he had particularly noticed, as she put it back. He took it down and looked at it.

It proved to be a work on India, and, viewed casually, seemed to present very few features of interest likely to appeal to Miss Ruthven, who, as she had confessed, was far from studiously inclined.

"I wonder what made her choose such a dry subject," thought Philip, as he put it on the shelf again. "Evidently it has been consulted pretty often of late, for there is no dust either upon or beneath it, and the books on each side are covered."

(To be continued.)

An International Lost Property Company, the "Eureka," is being planned in Germany. At a yearly cost of one shilling, each subscriber can mark his property with a certain number, and, should anything go astray, the corresponding members in different towns will be bound to hunt up the missing article.



["I HAVE THIS AFTERNOON PROPOSED TO YOUR SISTER AND BEEN ACCEPTED," SAID HUBERT HARTLEY, QUIETLY.]

NOVELETTE.]

FOR LOVE AND HONOUR.

CHAPTER I. THE NEW CURATE.

THE curate of Morton Stavely was dead. For thirty-five long years he had humbly served his rector, doing his duty faithfully and well, seeking no preferment and finding none, hidden away in the quiet village from the eyes of the bishop, and unknown to the busy world without.

He had never married; and women, who had looked upon him with favour in his youth and prime, had passed away, or grown old and grey. The yearning of early days was buried in the grave, or forgotten in the cares and pains of old age.

Why he did not marry was never quite clear to the village, but speculation on the subject had long died away. The poor loved him, and wept when he died; the rector respected him as a faithful servant, and preached a touching sermon on his life, but the dead man faded quickly out in the past when the new curate came.

There is no greater contrast between youth and age than there was between John Dartnall dead and Hubert Hartley living. The man so recently departed from among them was as placid as a sluggish stream with well-stretched banks, just moving on in life—no more. He who came to take his place was as a rapid, sparkling stream, with possible torrents behind and cascades ahead.

He came late one Saturday night, and preached his first sermon on the next day. He entered the church a perfect stranger to all there but the rector, and he took Morton Stavely by storm.

"He is more fit for the army than the church," said Mrs. Grainger, "and he would have been the handsomest officer in the service."

She addressed her daughter Marie, a handsome girl of nineteen, with rather a proud look in her face, who answered absently,—

"There are many handsome men in the service, and out of it too—but Morton Stavely is not favoured with the presence of many of them."

"Marie," said Mrs. Grainger, sharply "you are not attending to me. I was speaking of Mr. Hartley; I was saying that he is a very handsome man."

"Is he?" said Marie, slightly raising her eyebrows, "I did not notice him particularly."

"Then you were the only woman in the church who neglected him."

"Perhaps so, but I am not interested in this man; I do not like curates. They are not worldly enough for me."

And Marie, as her mother glanced sharply at her, smiled, and showed her beautiful teeth, a charming feature in a most charming face.

"I hear that Mr. Hartley is rich," remarked Mrs. Grainger, in a casual way, as they turned from the road into the walk that led to Denvilles, their home.

"Then he is worse than I took him to be," returned Marie.

"Worse! How?"

"A man with wealth, who consents to be a curate, is one of those very goody-goody—"

"I do not think Mr. Hartley is goody-goody—"

"Or self-sufficient people," pursued Marie, unmoved by the interruption, "who think they have a great work to do and think they have done it, when they have frittered away their years in harassing poor people with visits, and crushed them with a sense of obligation, by giving them blankets and beef at Christmas."

"Marie! Marie," remonstrated Mrs. Grainger, "a new spirit has taken possession of you. Only a few months ago, when Gordon Gray was here, you—"

"I hope you do not assume that Gordon Gray had any influence over my thought and speech," interposed Marie, with a slight frown on her brow.

"Not at all, my dear child," returned Mrs. Grainger. "I simply named him to mark a definite time when you were different to what you are now. You had none of that cynical spirit in you then."

"Indeed!" said Marie, pausing before a rose-bush and inhaling the odour of its bloom; "am I cynical now?"

"Not very, but a little inclined that way. You are quieter, too, and sometimes I have fancied that you shed tears when alone," replied Mrs. Grainger.

"I shed tears!" repeated Marie, burying her face deep in the rose-bush. "What on earth have I to weep for?"

"Nothing I should say," said Mrs. Grainger, "but people often weep without cause, especially silly people."

"And I am silly, I suppose!"

"Not at all, Marie. I did not intend that remark to apply to you."

At this moment a good-looking young fellow, very much like Marie—as like, indeed, as man can be to woman—came lounging out of the shrubbery with a pipe between his teeth, and inborn laziness written in every movement.

This was Robert Grainger—"Bob" to his familiars—the idle, good-for-nothing son of Mrs. Grainger. He and Marie were twins, but beyond the fact of their having been born together, and bearing a strong resemblance to each other, they had little in common.

Marie was unselfish, generous, and would have died rather than have allied herself with dishonour; while Bob was all for himself, and could do a mean action without hesitation when it served his turn. Marie knew him, for she could read his soul as an open book, and yet she loved him. Some mysterious link held her to him. Perhaps it was pity that lay at the root of it—a truly noble spirit regrets to find meanness and baseness in others.

"Halloa, good people!" said Bob, "so you are back. Ten minutes earlier than usual."

"The new curate preached but twenty minutes," replied Mrs. Grainger.

"And long enough too, by George!" said Bob, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, "except for the sleepers, and I daresay some of them granted us having a short nap."

"Really, Bob," said Marie, "you are incorrigible. You won't go to church, and I think you ought not to criticise those who do."

"I won't, then," returned Bob, yawning.

"How do you like the new fellow?"

"Mamma likes him very well," replied Marie.

"I did not want to know how mother liked him," said Bob. "I asked how you liked him?"

Mrs. Grainger had gone into the house, and the brother and sister were alone. He stood with his hands in his pockets, smoking and looking at Marie with eyes that seemed to be looking for something, and she still occupied herself with the rose-bush.

"How can I love or dislike him under the circumstances," asked Marie; "I have only seen him under conditions that did not admit of my thinking much about him."

"Oh, I understand all that," said Bob, coolly. "Of course you were like the other girls, and did not look at him or think of him a bit. Now be candid, what do you think of him?"

"I tell you, Bob, that I have not thought of him at all."

"And I tell you, Marie, that you are talking bosh—nonsense! You could not look at a stranger even for five minutes without thinking something good or bad about him."

"Well, then," said Marie, blushing, "since you insist upon it, I may say that I don't like him."

"That's a pity, Marie."

"Why?"

"Because I am going to make a chum of him. I have been looking him up in the 'Landed Gentry,' and I find that he belongs to the Hartleys of Fevrl Moor—awfully rich people!"

"Oh! Bob—Bob!" and Marie, turning towards him with a quick movement of entreaty, "I beg of you not to talk in that way!"

"Now here comes one of the old lectures," said Bob, "and I tell you frankly, Marie, that I have had enough of them. It's the duty of a fellow who is poor to make friends with the rich. He owes it to—himself—and to those who are near to him."

"We can only be poor in honour," said Marie; "we are rich until we debase ourselves by—"

"I tell you, Marie," interrupted Bob, with a frown, "that I won't have it. What lies ahead of you and me? Mother may live another thirty years—she looks like it—"

"Oh! Bob—shocking!"

"And when she dies what is left? About a hundred a year for each of us. Can you live on that?"

"Yes," said Marie, with a proud look; "and less."

"I can't," rejoined Bob, "and I don't mean to try—one of us must marry money—"

"Bob," said Marie, hastily; "I see mamma at the window. Luncheon is ready."

"Let luncheon wait until I impress upon you two things. The first is that I am going to make friends with this Hartley fellow, and, secondly, I mean you to do the same."

"Have you not dragged me low enough?" asked Marie, in a quiet tone of despair.

"I dragged you down? How?"

"Have you forgotten how Gordon Gray came and left us?"

"Gordon Gray may go to Bath!" said Bob, snapping his fingers; "confound him! What did the beggar mean by sticking himself up over his money?"

"No—no, Bob, he did not do that."

"What did he do, then?"

"Oh! do not ask me, Bob. It is a painful subject, and I was wrong to name it—it is enough that he went away despising us."

"He can despise us if it pleases him," said Bob, coolly; "I can undertake to say that it won't hurt me. Now, bother Gordon Gray, and let us go into luncheon."

So saying, he put his arm around her, and led her in, pleased with even a very bad imitation of brotherly love.

Had he been one atom less selfish than he was he must have been touched by her yielding to him. But he was a man of wood or stone whose others were concerned. Touch him in things that closely concerned himself, and he would be as sensitive as the worms that lay hidden in the ground on which he trod. He was indeed of the earth earthy.

CHAPTER II.

BOB GRAINGER'S PLANS.

He was as good as his word. On the morrow he laid siege to Hubert Hartley, and sought to lead him into the close social communion that often passes for friendship, but he found the task a little harder than he expected.

In his own opinion Bob was a charming fellow. He looked into the glass and saw a figure that was undeniably handsome, and he felt he had within him those social graces that go far to win the hearts of men and women. And he had some foundation for this belief in himself. People generally took to him and believed in him until they found him out. This people of the world were not long in doing.

Hubert Hartley had taken rooms at Morley's farm, where a simple yeoman and his wife resided.

They were childless people, and not sorry to have a lodger, especially of the position held by the curate.

The homestead was not more than half-a-mile from the church across the fields, and about the same distance from Denvilles.

Thither, on the following afternoon, Bob Grainger, with a couple of dogs at his heels, wended his way. He was in his most genial mood, literally beaming with good fellowship, and, assured of a welcome, he strolled up to the farm.

Morley was in the garden, repairing as far as he could some damage the pigs had done to his wife's favourite geraniums, and lifted his hat to Bob as he raised the latch of the gate.

"Nice day, sir," he said.

"Couldn't be better for the crops, I suppose?" said Bob. "Your wheat looks pretty well."

He had come through it, but had scarcely glanced at it by the way. As a matter of fact, he did not know how it looked. What was Morley's wheat to him? It gave him neither food, clothing, or drink, nor even so much as a pipe of tobacco.

"Yes, I'm thankful to say that it's pretty well sir," replied Morley. "But one could do with a little more sun. You see, sir, we've had rain enough, and now we want the warmth to draw up the moisture and fill the ear."

"That's just what we do want," said Bob, "and I hope we shall get it. Mr. Hartley?"

"Yes, he's reading, I think, and said he was not to be disturbed."

"Except by visitors, of course?" said Bob, coolly. "Just take my card in!"

Morley did not like to refuse. Bob Grainger was one of the "gentry," and to refuse anything to them required moral courage that the yeoman possessed. With a doubting heart he wiped his hands upon a red pocket-handkerchief—took the piece of pasteboard between his finger and thumb as carefully as if it had been some highly explosive, and went in.

Bob followed so close upon his card that if Hubert Hartley had been inclined to refuse to see him, it would have been impossible to do so without being rude to his face. Bob looked at the curate, and saw at a glance that he had not very pliable material to deal with.

A tall, broad-shouldered young fellow, five-

and-twenty at the outside, with a quiet, handsome face, and dark eyes, with a searching power in them that made even the cool, audacious Bob shrink a little.

He glanced at the card Morley laid upon the table and, advancing, held out his hand.

The grasp of his hand was not a cold one, nor was it very warm.

Bob, keenly alive to the little signs that show "which way the wind blew," saw a difficult channel, with possible rocks ahead of him.

"I have hastened," said Bob, as he sat down, "to welcome you to Morton Stavelay. I fear you will find it dull, and its inhabitants a vexatious people."

"I came here prepared for a quiet life," replied Hubert Hartley.

The conversation that ensued was of a very commonplace order.

Bob tried to be genial, but all his advances were received with well-bred blindness. The curate would not see his advances, and every arrow of friendship discharged from the visitor's bow fell blunted against the stone wall of polite rejection.

Bob went home dissatisfied and out of temper, and, as very often happened, poor Marie got the full benefit of his ill-humour.

Bob had promised to take her for a drive on his return, and the little pony and carriage attached to Denvilles was in waiting, with Marie already seated.

"Can't go out to-day," he said, as he lounged up. "I forgot I promised to go and see Byles about that terrier."

"But you don't want another dog," urged Marie.

"I want that dog," said Bob, "and I mean to have it if he doesn't ask too much. You must drive alone to-day, Marie."

"Very well, Bob," said Marie, with tears in her eyes.

"And, by the way," said Bob, "I've called on that curate fellow, and found him a bit of a cad. I don't think we need trouble ourselves about him."

Marie drove off to enjoy her lonely drive as well as she could, and ere long met the curate, who had excited her brother's ire. He was walking along with the strong stride of the athlete, and as they passed their eyes met. No recognition was, of course, exchanged, but they knew each other. Marie's likeness to her brother was a sufficient guide to her identity.

"A handsome girl," thought Hubert Hartley; "and I don't see anything in her face like what Grayspoke of. I like her eyes; they are at least fearless, if not honest."

"Nothing of the cad in that man," thought Marie; "a gentleman every inch of him—and a man in the bargain—the usual enforced meekness of his class is also happily absent."

Thus with opinions of each other veering round to a favourable quarter, they went their respective roads.

Hubert had not intended to call at Denvilles for at least a week, but now he thought that Thursday would be late enough.

Finally, when Wednesday came, he thought that day would do as well as any other, perhaps better, and returned Bob's call. That gentleman, not anticipating so prompt a visit from the curate, was away with the keeper of a neighbouring squire enjoying the plebeian yet congenial sport of rattling. Mrs. Grainger and Marie were at home.

The reception Hubert Hartley met with was not quite what he expected. The pressing geniality of Bob was entirely absent. Mrs. Grainger received him with pleasant courtesy, and Marie quietly.

He stayed as he estimated about a quarter of an hour, and was surprised on leaving when he referred to his watch, to find that he had passed a little over double that time at Denvilles.

"The mother is well here, and I think a clever woman," he mused. "The daughter if cold is agreeable. Gray must have made a mistake. I see nothing of the scheming match-maker about either of them."

When Bob came back, just in time to sit down in his walking clothes to dinner, he was both elated and depressed on hearing that Hubert Hartley had returned his call—elated at the curate's promptness, and depressed over his own absence.

"A chance of cultivating him thrown away," he muttered. "Confound the rats!"

To make amends for this opportunity lost he hunted up Hubert on the morrow, as he was going round the village making acquaintance with the poor people. Having fairly fastened himself on to the curate, he soon began to indulge in his little pleasantries.

"If you want to print yourself in the memory of these old people," he said, "you cannot do better than to use a silver die. Stamp your image upon them with half-a-crown."

Hubert only slightly shrugged his shoulders in reply, and Bob left in doubt as to the reception accorded to his pleasantries. When he had almost bored the curate to death he tore himself away and lounged home.

"I say, Marie," he said, peeping into the drawing-room, where she sat alone, "I met Hartley to-day. We have been out all the afternoon together. I've changed my mind about him; he is a very pleasant fellow. Ask him to luncheon with us next Monday."

"I think we had better wait a few days, Bob."

"Not a bit of it. Make hay while the sun shines."

And, singing, he went upstairs, leaving Marie with a cloud upon her.

"Make hay while the sun shines," she repeated. "What sun is there in my poor life? Oh! Bob—Bob—if you only knew!"

But Bob did not know and he did not care. He knew that Hubert Hartley had ample means at the present time, and would one day be a very rich man. Just the sort of husband suitable for Marie, and who would, through her, see that Bob did not "starve"—in other words, keep him in idleness.

The invitation was sent, not for Monday, but for Wednesday. The good sense of Mrs. Grainger saw the folly of rushing at the curate, even if nothing but a friendship were sought to be established. Marie, as far as she was concerned, was a free agent. If she wished to marry it were better that she should marry well, but without the prospect of happiness it were better for her not to marry at all.

"Her own heart must choose," thought the mother, "even as mine did. Its instincts unhampered will not go astray or err."

Hubert Hartley accepted the invitation, but his answer did not come until the last moment politeness allowed. He pleaded his duties as an excuse for this delay, but he had been doing battle with himself on the subject.

"Why should I fear to go?" he said to himself; "say that Gray is right—that this girl is mercenary—what is it to me? Am I the man to be led by a pair of beautiful eyes and a musical voice? Is Hubert Hartley a coward?"

So he went, and saw much of the beautiful eyes and heard much of the musical voice during the three hours he spent at Denvilles, and Bob did not bore because Bob was discreet, and left Marie to entertain him. That discreet youth looked upon himself as a successful pioneer only. The afterwork belonged to his sister.

Marie liked Hubert Hartley. There was a charm in his manner that when he chose to exercise it was very pleasing. And he exercised it that day against his will, because he liked Marie, and she yielded to the fascination of the hour even while she fought against it.

After luncheon they adjourned to the garden and strolled about. Denvilles was only a moderate-sized family dwelling, very old and very pretty, and all that a reasonable man or woman could desire, but it had very extensive grounds. A wheezy old gardener kept them in order, and Marie assisted him in planning and the light work.

It was her hand that planted the roses, arranged the beds, and made shady corners

pretty with ferns. In fifty places Hubert saw the charming, unconventional touches of a woman's hand. The imposing heartlung flower-beds so much in vogue were not to be seen at Denvilles, only the sweet disorder of honest, simple taste.

"You have a good gardener here," he said, as they halted before a bed of heliotropes, pansies, roses, and sweet Williams.

"Indeed we haven't," replied Bob, thoughtlessly. "Jeremy is an old duffer!"

Jeremy, the wheezy old man aforesaid, happened to be in the shrubbery just within hearing and he growled something that was not a blessing on Bob's head. It fell harmlessly of course, as such blessings invariably do.

"I am not alluding to the man who does the digging and gathers up the dead leaves," said Hubert, "but to the hand that made all this natural. Am I indebted to Mrs. Grainger or you?" turning to Marie.

"I planted the flowers," replied Marie, "but I cannot see how you can be indebted to me."

"I assure you," he said, earnestly, "that so much natural beauty as I have seen here to-day has given me more pleasure than anything I have seen for years."

And then their eyes met.

"By Jove!" muttered Bob, under his breath, "he bites soon."

He would have stolen away, but Marie called him back, and asked him if he had any cigars.

"Mr. Hartley, I presume, would like to smoke," she said; and Hubert, puzzled at the want of recognition of his compliment, took a cigar from the case Bob offered him and lit it.

"I frankly confess," he said, "that I like a cigar—or pipe."

"Perhaps you prefer a pipe?" said Marie.

"When alone, and in my own rooms," he answered.

Bob was very angry with his sister. He considered that a good opportunity had been wilfully thrown away, but he was unable to exhibit his anger before a guest, and contented himself, perforce, with a glance of disapproval when he could give one safely.

Marie received them as a knight of old received an arrow in his shield. It touched and went away, leaving no visible mark behind.

At four o'clock Hubert tore himself away—it must be said reluctantly. Mrs. Grainger offered him tea, but he pleaded parish business as an excuse for declining. He was charmed with his visit to Denvilles, but dissatisfied with himself, for he was a close friend of Gordon Gray's, and had come armed with a warning to avoid the snares of the brother and the wiles of the sister.

"I can't understand it, he mused, as he sauntered back, not to the parish, but to Morley's farm. "Gray is not a fool nor a man to speak lightly or hastily against a woman. I'll take a day soon, and run up to Tom and see him. I must know more clearly what happened to him here."

CHAPTER III.

GORDON GRAY'S STORY.

The opportunity Hubert sought was no offered for a week or more. Having come so recently to Morton Stavelay he could not with very good grace absent himself even for a day.

There was also so much to learn about the parish, and the duties attached to it, that he had little time to himself.

The Reverend Charles Warner was a touchy old man, and having been relieved of nearly all his labours by the late curate had got a little out of harness work, and was not disposed to resume it.

So everything was against Hubert's going, but by sheer application he got things ahead, and some few days after his luncheon at Denvilles found that he could take twenty-four hours to himself.

Rising early he took the first morning train, and arrived in London about half-past nine, breakfasted at an hotel, and drove to the Junior

Carlton. There he expected to find Gordon Gray, and was not disappointed.

Gordon Gray was the possessor of an estate in Lincolnshire that brought him in about five thousand a year. His age might be eight-and-twenty, and he had good looks of the Saxontype, enough for a man who does not aspire to be a drawing-room darling or a fop. Without being a fool he certainly was not clever; ambition did not ruffle him, and he was good-natured up to a certain point. He could be angry under a real or fancied wrong, and rather unforgiving.

"Now who would have thought of seeing you!" he said, as he wrung Hubert's hand. "Here have I been praying for some really good fellow to come and relieve my misery, and here is the best fellow come in answer to my prayer."

"I am afraid I can only give you a few hours at the outside," replied Hubert. "I must catch the five o'clock train to be back at Morton Stavelay before the good people are in bed."

Oh! I forgot you were there," returned Gordon Gray, drily. "Well, what do you think of the people?"

"They are just what I expected—no more and no less."

"Aged rector, feeble society, flighty girls, old people with rheumatism and so on?"

"Just so."

"A strange life for you to choose."

"So it is, Gray; but I have a fancy for a quiet life. Now I am here to ask you something about somebody at Morton Stavelay."

"Say Denvilles," returned Gordon Gray.

"Yes, it is of the people of Denvilles of whom I would speak," said Hubert. "Tell me what happened to you there."

"My good fellow, I would rather not."

"Pardon me, but you must!"

"Must is a hard word, even for you to apply to me in such a case."

"Nevertheless, Gordon, I cannot recall it," returned Hubert. "I have made the acquaintance of Marie Grainger—"

"And she has put her net about you?"

"And I am anxious to know what caused you to warn me against her."

"My good fellow!" said Gordon Gray, with a doubtful face, "it is a very delicate subject. I would not have hinted it to any other man. But you were going right into the snare, and as I knew you to be a thorough good fellow, very susceptible—"

"Leave all that," said Hubert, "and trust me with your story. I shall never make use of it, or breathe a word of it to a living being."

"But what is your object?"

"To learn the truth!"

"But why bother yourself about it?"

"Because I feel that I am falling in love with Marie Grainger, and I want to know what lies ahead of me."

"Whew!" whistled Gordon, "so bad as that already? This gentle Marie has made quick work of you."

"She has not done anything at all," said Hubert, restlessly. "For Heaven's sake, man! don't answer that I am the victim of a woman's wiles. We have met as people generally do and we have talked in the conventional way nothing more."

"At present," replied Gordon Gray. "My dear fellow, just listen to me. It won't do."

"Why not?"

"Because Bob Grainger and his sister are hunting up a fortune, and she will marry the first man who offers himself with one."

"On what grounds do you make this assertion?"

"On the grounds of experience. Your attention for a moment, please," said Gordon Gray. "Bob Grainger and I were schoolfellows at Rugby, and chance brought us together again about a year ago. He was my junior, and I used to take care of him at school, which he remembered, and I did not, and for which he expressed gratitude."

"It is something to have a kindness remembered."

"So it is, but not a very pleasant something when you find how much another's gratitude cost you. I was dull, as I generally am, and told Bob so. He offered to take me to his home, and I went, like a fool. Then I was introduced to his sister, and fell in love with her."

"I do not wonder at that," said Hubert.

"She is pretty enough to catch any man," replied Gordon, "especially such a poor fly as myself, blundering about the world, ready for any web spread for me. I fell in love with Marie, and we soon became close friends. Bob was never unreasonably in the way, and I had a clear field and no favour."

"One moment," said Hubert. "How did Marie receive your attentions?"

"She was not displeased," said Gordon, thoughtfully; "but, at the same time, I don't think I aroused any particular enthusiasm in her heart. She certainly did not love me; if she had I might have forgiven her for plotting against me."

"Plotting?"

"Patience, my dear fellow; you must let me tell my story my own way, and use such expressions as I will. To me it appears that I was plotted against. You shall be the judge of the justice of my views."

"Go on."

"One evening I was seated in one of the arbours in the garden alone. I was musing, and Marie was the theme that made my thoughts pleasant. I was in one of those dreamy moods when a man feels that he would like to rest in that way for ever. To rouse one from such a state requires a great shock, or a big effort on the part of the dreamer. I am not good at making great efforts, but I received my shock, and was awakened."

Hubert Hartley shifted a little in his seat, and shaded his eyes with his hand. He was like a man who feels that while he hears a bitter story he must hide the emotion inspired by it.

"Presently," continued Gordon, "I heard footsteps on the gravel walk, and people talking. I recognized the voice of Bob Grainger speaking in exultant tones. 'You have him now, Marie,' he was saying, 'and I would lead him to propose to-night. He has six thousand a year—don't forget that.' Marie murmured something, and Bob went on, 'You have always been a good sister to me, and I can't tell you how pleased I am that you have secured so good a match.' It was mean of me to listen to all this, Hartley, wasn't it?"

"It was unusual, certainly," assented Hubert, rather coldly.

"For the life of me I could not help myself at the moment," said Gordon Gray, with a penitent air; "I sat just like a frozen man. 'You see,' said Bob, 'that he is deeply in love with you, and the least encouragement will lead him to the point from which he cannot retreat with honour.' They were now opposite the arbour, and I made a movement that attracted their attention. Never shall I forget their faces as they turned and saw me. His was ablaze, and hers as white as alabaster."

"I came out," continued Gordon Gray, "and for a moment we stood looking at each other. I must give Marie credit for not quailing before my anger. She has at least the virtue of courage. Turning to Bob, I said, 'There is a train at 7.30, I believe, I had better go by that.' 'You have heard us talking,' he said, wretchedly. 'Yes,' I replied, 'I could not help myself. I am sorry, but perhaps it is for the best. Is there any way of sparing Mrs. Grainger's feelings?' I spoke to Marie, but she did not answer me, so I offered a suggestion to Bob. 'I can plead a sudden call to London,' I said, 'and there will be an end to the matter. I shall tear up your I.O.U.s., for there will be no need for us to communicate in future.' He had borrowed almost two hundred pounds of me, Hartley, and I did not want him to be writing about it. I wished to have done with him at once, and for all."

"You had no more talk with Marie?" said Hubert.

"Not a word," replied Gordon; "what was there to say? She offered me no defence—indeed, had none to offer. I had narrowly escaped being made the victim of a nice little plot. The fellow took me home to marry his sister, and she was prepared to receive me with sufficient warmth to lure me on."

"It is a horrible thing, if true."

"My dear fellow, you don't doubt me?"

"No; but Marie surely—"

"You should have seen her face," said Gordon Gray, "that spoke plainer than her tongue could have done—detected schemer was written in every feature."

"I would have given ten thousand pounds rather than have heard this story," said Hubert Hartley.

"My dear fellow," remonstrated Gordon Gray, "you forced it from me."

"True. My meaning was that I would rather have given ten thousand pounds than there should have been such a story to tell."

CHAPTER IV.

IN DOUBT AND SORROW.

HUBERT HARTLEY WAS BACK at Morton Stately by eight; but he did not retire to rest until long after midnight.

He was very unhappy, and he was angry with himself for being so. A sense of mortification had come upon him.

"What weakness is it that makes me the victim of a pretty face, and a mock reserve?" he said to himself. "It is all a sham, and I ought to know better than to think of Marie for a moment. And I have been bitten before! Oh, fool!"

The yeoman and his wife had retired, and he had the whole house to himself. The moon was up, and a great silence lay upon the landscape without.

Quietly opening the window—a low one—he stepped out, and, crossing the garden, entered the fields.

Before him lay a faint thread of a path that led by a short route through a wood to the village. Instinctively keeping to it he wandered slowly on, thinking.

It was a night for sad thoughts—the winds were hushed, and the leaves of the trees drooped in the warm, damp summer air. The silence of the night was only broken by the stealthy rustle of the rabbit or hare creeping through the grass, and the mournful cry of the cornrake.

Above him some bats winged their silent flight unheeded by him, for he was thinking of a past, and linking it with the present in bitterness of spirit.

He had loved, or thought he loved, before, and he had been deceived by a woman who had weighed his wealth in the balance with another, and taken the richer man. Of that there could be no doubt, for that cynical beauty, Cecilia Mowbray, had told him so when he asked her to be his wife.

"Tom Daker has fifteen thousand a year," was her answer, "and I am going to marry him."

He called to mind the calm manner of that woman, who had encouraged him for a time, and then thrown him over. The memory of that humiliation had been very bitter, and he had chosen his career after his rejection.

Two years at a theological college prepared him for the church, and he came down to Morton Stately determined upon spending a quiet life. A simple, unostentatious, useful existence was all he aspired to, and could he have drifted on for a few years he might have settled into it, and become another John Dartnall.

But the Fates, or what you may be pleased to call the pressure of circumstances that shapes a man's career, were against him. No sooner had he entered upon his new life than Marie Grainger crossed his path.

More than two years had elapsed since the

cool and calculating Cecilia had left him stranded high and dry upon the sands of rejected love, and the misery of that wreck was in part forgotten. It had ceased to pain him, and he was happy in the assurance of being free when he saw Marie.

In choosing his career he had not properly estimated the instincts and the passionate powers within him. To settle in it he must crush many ardent longings, half-developed aspirations, and a thousand and one impulses of hot-blooded early manhood. He might have done so, but then, you see, there was Marie.

"I cannot make love to and marry a woman for her face alone," he groaned. "Great Heaven! Why is so much beauty marred by falsity and cunning?"

He could not doubt the story of Gordon Gray, for Gordon was certainly honest. It was clear that he had neither added to or taken away, and the unspeakable baseness of the brother and sister in conspiring together to secure his wealth excited in Hubert Hartley the utmost loathing.

But, despite himself, he separated this conduct from the woman.

He hated the meanness, but he loved Marie. It was useless to deny it to himself, even for a moment.

On his way back from London, alone in a first-class compartment, he had examined his heart thoroughly, and he saw her image there.

"I love her," he said, "and I cannot fly from her in honour, for I am bound to Morton Stately for two years."

Thus he groaned, and echoed the groaning again as he walked in the wood at midnight. He was ashamed of his weakness, and unreasonably spoke bitterly of himself, forgetting how often men, better and wiser than he was, had fallen victim to the wiles of woman.

Great deeds have been done for woman's sake, and dark crimes stand on the record of her influence. Kings have sacrificed themselves, and their people, too, at the bidding of a woman's voice.

Did not David commit a great sin for passion's sake? Mark Antony lingered by the side of Cleopatra until Rome cried shame upon it. Great soldiers, sailors, statesmen, poets, painters, and others, in untold numbers, have been made or marred by woman.

Who, then, was Hubert Hartley that he should rise above the rest and make light of her influence?

And yet he was confident of the victory. It was the dread of the battle that made him groan. It was so hard to leave the sunshine of hopeful manhood clouded over by such a drift.

"But life is all war," he said, "from the cradle to the grave."

With dew-soaked garments he returned home at dawn, and sought rest.

Ere he closed his eyes the house was stirring, and he heard the cheery voice of the yeoman calling to his men.

"No passion mars his life," thought Hubert. "Better be a clod than suffer as I do!"

An hour's sleep sufficed, and he was up at his usual time with no signs of the struggle of the night.

Having breakfasted and given instructions about dinner he went to the rectory.

One day's absence had brought its additional work. Two of the old women, of that class who are always ill and always going to die, and yet live on until they become objects of interest to the reporters of local papers, had sent for the curate, and finding him absent despatched imperative summonses to the rectory.

"I do hope, Mr. Hartley," said the Rector, testily, "that you will not think of going away again. It is early, in any case, to take a holiday."

"A matter of some importance—to myself," said Hubert, "called me to town."

"Well, I hope you have settled it, whatever it is," returned the Rector. "Dartnall never

thought of a holiday during the last fifteen years. I don't think he went half-a-dozen miles outside the parish."

"What a life the poor devil must have had," thought Hubert, as he went away to administer consolation to the old women. "Fifteen years, and not out of here! Merciful Heaven, what stagnation!"

The old women had got quite well again. The aches and pains, whatever they were, that had afflicted them were laid by for use on some future occasion; but they rated the curate more soundly than the rector had done.

He heard again about the ever resident Dartnall, and, having given balm for their wounds in the shape of half-a-crown a-piece, went away, groaning in spirit.

"I don't think I shall be able to bear it," he muttered. "I shall want something to sustain me if I stop here!"

He turned into the street and met Marie. Here, in a sense, was the support he needed, but he dare not accept it. He felt that with Marie—that is, the Marie he would have her be—he could bear a harder life than that of Morton Stavelay; but, with the memory of Gordon Gray's story, he dare not seek her aid.

They met as acquaintances, and exchanged a few words only. There was nothing out of the common apparent in the look or voice of either, and yet each saw that the other was troubled. A mutual resolve to keep apart was made.

But it could not be done. The village was a very small circle indeed, and they had to go round and round it almost daily. Hubert had his work, which he must attend to, and Marie a self-imposed duty, which she would not neglect.

Neither would fly from the rock ahead, and both hoped to steer clear of it, but their anchors had but a poor hold, and they were drifting fast upon it.

Bob Grainger soon began to be impatient. He had hoped for what he called "better things." Hubert Hartley did not increase his attentions to Marie as he had been expected to do, and Marie certainly did not encourage him. Bob thought he would speak to her about it, and chose a favourable opportunity when Mrs. Grainger was away on a round of afternoon calls.

"I tell you what it is, Marie," he said, abruptly; "you will have to wake up, or nothing will come of Hartley's visits."

Marie was engaged in needlework by the window, and hung her head as she replied,—

"Indeed, Bob; I do not quite understand you."

"Oh, yes, you do," he coolly replied. "It was quite understood that Hartley was the man for you."

"Bob, do have mercy on me," said Marie, turning towards him with swimming eyes.

"Have you thought what marriage is?"

"I know very well what it is," he answers. "Two people go to church together, and get bound in the bonds of holy matrimony, and live happily ever afterwards—if they can."

"It is a tie for life," said Marie, "and ought not to be lightly entered into."

"It's all right if there's money."

"It cannot be right, Bob, if there is no love."

"Then fall in love with Hartley," said Bob; "you can do it if you like. Any girl can fall in love with a fellow if she chooses. There, give him a little encouragement, and marry him. It is all he wants, but if you don't give it to him he will go steering off in another direction."

"I love you very much, Bob," said Marie, very pale, "but I do not think I could marry anyone I didn't love, even to oblige you."

"Marie," said Bob, looking keenly at her, "do you mean to say you do not care for him?"

Marie turned her face away, but made no answer.

"Come," said Bob, "let me look at your face. I know you can't look an untruth even if you attempt to speak one."

"I can't bear it, Bob!" cried Marie, springing up, with her eyes flashing. "How can you be so cruel to me? I won't endure it."

"Oh, come!" he answered, "none of the heroine tricks with me. If you are a bit of a fool I must be your guide and mentor."

"And I tell you that I will not marry him," said Marie. "I will not be led into a degrading alliance, even by you."

"What nonsense! a degrading alliance," sneered Bob. "But I see you are out of humour to-day, and—"

"I am in the same humour as I was in yesterday," said Marie, "and I shall be to-morrow, and until I die. I will not woo a man, and I wonder how you dare suggest it."

"Dare, indeed! If it comes to that I dare anything," returned Bob, savagely.

"Where is your manhood, then?" asked Marie, hotly. "Have you no shame? and you would barter away a sister who loves you as I do, for your selfish ends!"

"You don't love me, Marie. It's all rubbish. If you did you would do as I wish."

"Bob, Bob!" said Marie, going up to him and kneeling down by his side, "be kind to me. Try to think that I am a woman, and that women do not think as men. I shrink from marriage altogether, and I could not stand at God's altar and vow to love, honour, and obey a man whom I have married for his possessions."

"Have done," said Bob, roughly; "there is something behind all this that I don't know of. There is some fellow whom you are in love with—some beggarly, penniless wretch who can talk sentiment by the hour."

"There is no one, Bob. Who is there in all Morton Stavelay to talk to me?" cried Marie.

"Then, if there isn't," he returned, "you are more unreasonable than ever. I tell you, Marie, that you are to marry Hubert Hartley."

"I cannot."

"You shall!"

"I will not," cried Marie, rising hotly. "You are a coward to talk to me in this way—you try my love, but you must not tax it too far."

"A fig for your love!" said Bob, with a contemptuous wave of his hand, "I want none of it."

Then, thrusting his hands into his pockets, he left the room whistling.

"And this is my brother!" said Marie, bitterly; "the brother for whom I would gladly have laid down my life. He would barter me away as he would a horse or a dog, so that he may have money. But I will not be bought and sold. The man I love may be a beggar, but I would not marry a man without love if he had all the wealth hidden under the deep sea."

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE.

FROM that hour Marie's life was a dreary blank. The loss of her brother's love was not so much of a matter as that she had no opportunity to exercise hers for him. Love is a thing that must be made useful, for it lays heavily on the heart of its possessor.

Bob was stolidly cool, and systematically neglected her; but he did not cease to profess friendship for Hubert Hartley. In this he gained more encouragement than he could have hoped for, and ere long his friendship developed its accustomed fruit. He was in need of a little loan, and he obtained it.

"We are poor," he said to Hubert, "Denville and three hundred a-year is all we have, and a hundred of it goes with my mother's death. We have many calls upon our purses, and, just now I am very short indeed. Will you lend me fifty pounds?"

"With pleasure," replied Hubert, and drew a cheque for the money.

Bob gave him an acknowledgment, and went home elated. He had no particular sense of shame, or even a feeling of obligation upon

him. He simply rejoiced at having "struck oil" again, and saw a liberal flow ahead.

Some of the money went to satisfy a pressing tailor, and a great portion of the remainder was invested in a celebrated bulldog, whose rat-killing powers were reputed to be unrivalled. He bought this of a man in a near market town, through the kindly offices of Byles, who was content with ten pounds by way of commission.

Marie saw the tailor's receipt, and had heard from Bob's own lips what the bulldog cost, and she was bowed down with shame. There was no need for her to be told where the money came from. The daily increasing intimacy between Hubert Hartley and her brother was a sufficient clue.

The autumn followed summer, waned and gave place to winter. Hubert was often at Denville, and Bob frequently at Morley's Farm. Marie had no excuse for avoiding Hubert, who never really made any real advances that could be called the attentions of a lover. Nevertheless she saw what was in his heart, and dreaded the day when he would speak.

"Oh! if things had been different!" she said, wearily.

But things were as they were, and all the hoping of a miserable woman could not change them. Hubert had grown upon her, and filled up the void that had never been filled before; but not even to him dare she admit it.

It was known to her, through Bob, that Hubert and Gordon Gray were intimate friends, and this added to her bitterness. The impression with which Gordon left was clear to her, and what if he had spoken? She bowed herself to the very ground, and dropped tears from her very soul, as she thought of it.

It was hard to have such vast happiness within her grasp, and yet be obliged to reject it.

"If he married me," ran her thoughts, "he must have suspicion of the purity of my love. Oh! that he were poor or sick, that I might comfort him."

Woman's vision is essentially that of the healer of wounds and consoler in the time of trouble; and the common instinct of her sex was very strong in Marie. She wanted to make some sacrifice, to show how strong in her duty she could be to the man she loved.

So the months passed, and Hubert came and went, and Bob went on borrowing until he owed his friend nearly two hundred pounds. Hubert was the most successful mine he had ever worked, but there were signs of his giving in, and he felt that he must proceed with caution, for fear that he should flood the works with suspicion, and get them stopped by a refusal.

And what he feared came to pass.

Early in February he had a pressing need of some money. It was a mere trifle, only twenty pounds, and he felt that he could safely ask for such a sum. Choosing an opportunity when he was having luncheon at Morley's farm he asked for it.

"My dear fellow," said Hubert, calmly, "I cannot do it. It is impossible."

"You think you have lent me enough?" said Bob, with a mortified look.

"Not at all. I have not thought of it until the last few days, when the need of money compelled me to do so."

Bob stared.

"The need of money!" he echoed. "Yes, my dear fellow," replied Hubert; "I have a letter here, I can trust you with its contents, and it will explain all."

Bob took an official-looking envelope and opened it. It released a very pretentious-looking document.

"DEAR SIR,—I regret to tell you that the Luck-for-All Mine was flooded a week ago, and after pumping for five days and nights, and finding no reduction of the water, the engineers have concluded that further efforts will be useless."

"Yours faithfully,
"BUNSEN AND ROBERTS."

"The Luck-for-All Mine," exclaimed Bob. "Why, that is where your money is!"

Hubert bowed, and offered Bob a potato; he declined, his appetite being gone.

"And you are hungry, Hartley?" he said.

"Not exactly," replied Hubert, composedly. "I have my curragy, and must live upon it. The money I lent you will, of course, be useful if you return it by instalments, and I was thinking to-day of asking you to let me have ten pounds."

"I haven't ten pence," said Bob, brusquely. "What a confounded nuisance it is! Why on earth didn't you tell me before this thing happened?"

"The mine was paying too well," replied Hubert, composedly; "the shares were at sixty premium."

"It's just my luck," growled Bob.

"Your luck?" said Hubert, regarding him with surprise.

"Yes; just as I want a little help from a friend, that friend goes wrong," and Bob's heart heaved like a billow as he thought of his misfortunes.

"Oh, that's your view of the matter, is it?" said Hubert. "Have another glass of sherry? The next time you take luncheon with me I shall only be able to give you beer."

Bob drank the wine gloomily, and continued to growl at his evil fortune until he rose to go. There was a decided change in his manner as he shook hands with his host, and he did not, as usual, ask him to come to Denvilles as soon as he had a few hours to spare.

Bob went grumbling home, confounding the mine and Hubert's stupidity in holding the shares so long.

"In my opinion," he said, unreasonably, "he did it to spite me. There never was any real friendship in the man."

He went into the drawing-room, and, finding it empty, drew a chair up to the fire, and sat down to read. By-and-by Marie came in. He looked up at her with a pleasant smile she had not seen in his face for months.

"Marie," he said, "I have been treating you very scurvily for a long time."

"Oh, never mind that!" returned Marie.

"But I do mind," he said; "and I tell you that I am awfully sorry for it."

Marie drew up a footstool and sat down, her arms resting on her knees.

"But," she said, "you don't know how happy you have made me. Now let us forget the past!"

"Yes," he said, "and all connected with it. Even that Hartley fellow must be forgotten."

A change came over Marie again, and she shivered slightly.

"You have been quarrelling with him," she said.

"Dunce a bit," replied Bob; "but, like an ass, he's been keeping his money in this Luck-for-All mine, and the mine's flooded. Hartley is next door to a beggar."

Marie looked inexpressibly shocked, and there were two causes for this feeling, although she did not say so. Bob had more to do with it than he suspected.

"Poor fellow!" she said. "How does he bear it?"

"Like a duffer," replied Bob; "began to hint about it as soon as we met, and wanted to know if I could let him have any money."

"But, Bob—don't—you owe him—a little?"

"Oh, I've borrowed money of the fellow; but he need not have been so deuced sharp after it. I don't like that class of man; and he and I won't be quite so chummy in future, I can tell you."

Marie saw all, and sat silent. Bob, unconscious of laying bare his double meanness, went on.

"I'm awfully glad you didn't marry him, and that's why I'm so sorry I was so cool to you. But it's all over now, Marie, isn't it?"

"All over," she said softly.

"And forgiven?"

"I have always forgiven you, Bob," she

said, and, stooping down, he kissed her. But the kiss was not returned.

"It's a lucky escape," continued Bob, sinking himself deeper and deeper in the mire of degradation, "and I'll be more particular in the future. I'll keep an eye on a fellow's investments, and give him a bit of advice now and then. Hartley talks of living on his curate money."

"How much is that?" asked Marie, quietly.

"He has a hundred and twenty a year."

"Well, he need not starve—not even if he had a wife."

"A wife!" echoed Bob, with a grin. "Why, what woman in her senses would marry him?"

"I would—if he asked me," said Marie, looking up at him fearlessly.

Bob recoiled from her, pushing back his chair and staring at her with angry surprise.

"You would marry him!" he cried.

"Yes," she said, "if I thought he loved me."

"And what do you think would become of you?" demanded Bob.

"I should labour hard to help Hubert in his career"—Marie began, but he savagely cut her short.

"You are a bigger fool than I took you to be!" he said; "and remember this—if you marry a beggar like that, you and I will be strangers for ever."

"If it would add to his happiness," said Marie, "I do not think that I ought to allow even your dissent to come between us."

"Oh! confound you both!" cried Bob. "I see you have been spooning in secret."

"No, Bob—no."

"But I say you have, and I say confound you!" When mother comes home I will hear what she has to say to it."

"I ask you to say nothing," said Marie, with a scarlet face. "I beg of you to be more considerate!"

"I'll say what I like!" replied Bob, fiercely; "and I'll go further than I originally intended. Hartley shall know you are spoons on him. I'll go and tell him."

"Bob, have mercy on me!"

"I'll tell him that he has only to ask to have, and when you are married I'll laugh at your grinding lives, and sneer at your beggary. It shall be sport to me!"

"Oh, brother! brother!" cried Marie, sinking to the floor. "Who gave you this trait void of all mercy?"

"I'm satisfied with my heart," he said, "and that ought to be enough. It's your heart that wants looking to. Where's your love for me, that's what I want to know?"

She did not answer him, but lay prone and silent on the floor; and he, after scowling at her for a few moments, turned and left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

AGAINST HIS WILL.

UTTERLY selfish and thoughtless as he was, Bob Grainger had done many things the remembrance of which ought to have made his ears tingle, but he was not man enough to carry out the threat he had hurled at Marie.

He had been favoured with the training of a gentleman, and if his instincts did not accord with it, he knew by experience it would never do for him to go and chatter to Hubert Hartley about the assumed love his sister entertained.

"If I understand the fellow right," he muttered, "he is one of those humbugs with high notions of honour and so forth. Ten to one but he would champion Marie's cause and knock me down!"

There was one, however, to whom he could speak freely, and that was Mrs. Grainger. He knew that she was not a very worldly woman, but he believed her to be endowed with prudence, and was sure that she would object to

Hubert Hartley as a lover for Marie now that comparative poverty had fallen upon him.

Mrs. Grainger listened to his somewhat too fervid statement, and when he had concluded, quickly asked him,—

"When did Mr. Hartley propose to Marie?"

"He's not done so yet," replied Bob, a little taken aback. "But Marie says that she will marry him if he does propose, and I am acting on the principle of prevention being better than cure."

"What would you have me do?"

"Take her away from Denvilles for a time. I'll look after the old place."

"My dear Bob," said Mrs. Grainger, "you forget that my income will not permit me to go here and there as I will; and if I could take Marie away, I doubt if any good would come of it."

"It would keep them apart," returned Bob. "Not a bit of it. If they are to come together they will do so in spite of you or me, or all the world. True love is not to be thwarted."

"But it would be such a horrible thing for Marie to marry a beggar!"

"You take an extreme view of the case. Hubert Hartley is not exactly a beggar, and I think he is the sort of man to make his way."

"You espouse his cause then?"

"I like him; but I do not see that I have any cause to espouse—as yet."

"All right," said Bob, with a frown. "Do as you please. It will end as I say. Hartley will come dancing about Marie, confound him! and they will marry. Then a nice thing it will be!"

"We won't make ourselves miserable about it," said Mrs. Grainger, with a good-humoured smile. "Wait until the dire event is fairly before us."

Bob was helpless, and could only growl. He soon had the exasperating picture of Marie and Hubert closer friends together; for Hubert coolly came more frequently to Denvilles, and either did not care a straw for the loss of his fortune, or was admirable in his power of concealing his sorrow.

From Marie the hand of constraint was lifted up. She could meet Hubert fearlessly now, and, come what might, there could be no suspicion resting upon her—no sordid motive could possibly be laid to her charge.

She loved Hubert, but she gave him no more encouragement than the most modest maiden may give. Her pleasure in his society she no longer attempted to conceal, and the joy he found in her's was apparent to all who saw them together.

The villagers were soon whispering that it would be a match, and one thoughtless old man ventured to say as much in Bob's hearing.

He cursed the old fellow, and forgot himself so far as to say that no slaver of his should marry a beggarly curate.

"Beggary or not," said the old man, stentily, "he be a real gentleman, which some as might be ain't."

In a white heat Bob set out from the village for Morley's Farm, determined upon stopping the affair at any cost. A little plain speaking to Hubert would, in his opinion, be sufficient.

"And by Jupiter I'll speak very plain!" he snarled.

Mrs. Morley was washing, and answered the hasty knock of Bob upon the door with arms covered with soap-suds, which she was slowly removing with her apron.

"Is Mr. Hartley in?" asked Bob, curtly.

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Morley, deliberately. "I can't say for certain, but he was in an hour ago, and he said he wasn't to be disturbed, as he was going to write his sermon."

"Oh, his sermon can wait," growled Bob. "Tell him that I want to see him."

Mrs. Morley hesitated, and was plainly in a troubled frame of mind. She looked aloft at the clear, wintry sky, then at the crocuses in the garden, and last of all at Bob.

"I'm a bit afraid, sir," she said, "to disturb him when he said it wasn't to be."

"I tell you," said Bob, raising his voice, "that I want to see him on a matter of great importance."

He hoped that Hubert would hear him and come out, but there was no movement in the little parlour.

Hubert was indeed away, and the delay Bob experienced was doing him a great service.

An hour before he had, as Mrs. Morley said, sat down to write his sermon, but between him and his work there came the image of Marie and something left undone which he felt ought to be done.

"I cannot rest while I have doubt for a companion," he murmured; "better know the best or worst at once."

It was nothing new that troubled him. For weeks he had dwelt upon it, watching her he loved until he was more than convinced that she was as pure and unselfish as woman can be, and that Gordon Gray had blundered.

With this conviction came the shame he felt at ever having doubted her, and a feeling of unworthiness held him back a little longer, but on that day the climax came.

How could he write sermons when so troubled with earthly things! Of what avail was it for him to try to fix his thoughts on things spiritual when things natural tossed him to and fro!

"I must know," he said, as he took up his hat, and quietly left the house; "even the worst will be nothing to this suspense."

It was strange that doubts should trouble him, but doubts always go hand-in-hand with love undeclared, and with love declared will sometimes summons jealousy to be a companion, trouble in the lover's breast. Hubert Hartley had doubts of what lay ahead of him, and he could not rest.

Fortune favoured him at Denyville. Mrs. Grainger was busy with some of the hidden mysteries of domestic life; but Marie was indulging in a little music in the drawing-room.

He had the privilege of a frequent visitor and his cloth to help him, and the servant ushered him without hesitation into the presence of Marie.

She rose with a bright flush on her face, and came forward to greet him. They shook hands, and there was a sensible increase of warmth in her touch that set his heart beating a little faster.

"Have you seen mamma?" she said. "I must let her know you are here."

"No! don't do that," he answers. "The fact is I did not come to see Mrs. Grainger to-day. It is you I particularly wish to see."

"If it is anything to do with the parish—"

"The parish has really nothing to do with it."

He took her hand, and it lay passive in his, as he looked at the drooping eyelids and quivering lips.

She knew what was coming, and now that the portentous moment has arrived she wanted to fly away; but she could not move.

"Marie," he said, "I do not know how I dare speak to you knowing my own unmanliness, but love prompts me to speak the words which it may be had better never been spoken—Marie, I love you."

He paused, and the eyelids drooped lower, and the lip quivered a little more, but she spoke not a word.

"Looking back," he said, "I see with shame that I once doubted, or, rather, misunderstood you. This much I am in honour bound to confess. Heaven pardon my folly."

"It was natural for you to judge me as you did," said Marie, in a low tone. "Had I been a man I should have done the same."

"It has been a pitiful error," he rejoined, "but I need say no more. We understand each other so far. Whatever answer you may give me, I beg of you that, at least, the past may be forgotten."

"I shall never think of it," said Marie.

"For the rest, I have hovered between hope

and despair," continued Hubert. "I have longed for your love, but dare not ask for it. Even as I once doubted you, so I have of late doubted my own conclusion to possess you. Marie, what answer have you for me?"

She bowed her head, and he could feel that she was trembling. Slowly his arm stole around her, and he drew her to him.

"Marie, darling, is it so? Have I so great a happiness in store?"

"Hubert, if you had come to me rich—"

"Yes, darling, if I had come to you rich?"

"I should have hidden my heart, and sent you away, but as you come to me poor—"

"As I come to you poor, dearest?"

"I need not hide the truth. If there is anything in my poor life worth taking, it is yours."

"Marie!"

He said no more, but led her to a seat, and there some half-hour later Mrs. Grainger found them.

"Well, my dear children," she said, when she had heard the lover's story. "You have made your choice, and I trust you will be happy. Of course, I could have wished that no ill-fortune had befallen you, Hubert."

"I have nothing but good fortune here," he said.

"Very well, if you think so I'll not gainsay it," returned Mrs. Grainger. "Money is not everything, although it goes some way towards making people happy. I am not sorry that you love each other, for I have always loved Marie; and I have learnt to love you, Hubert, also."

Meanwhile, Bob, having been unable to induce Mrs. Morley to knock at the door and disturb the curate, who was not there to be disturbed, lingered about the garden with the hope of his coming out, and after a bit of delay sat down and filled his pipe.

"I can wait a bit," he said, "the temper I am in will keep."

He had got well into his second pipe when, to his amazement, he saw Hubert coming across the fields with a light step, and a face beaming with happiness.

"Why, he's not at home, after all!" growled Bob, and the discovery did not put him into a better temper.

As Hubert entered the gate he rose up and said—

"Mr. Hartley, a word with you."

"As many as you please," replied Hubert, smiling.

"You need not grin at me," said Bob, rudely, "for I am not in a humour to hear it."

"Perhaps you had better go home," returned Hubert, calmly, "and come again when your humour is more congenial to others."

"No time like the present," said Bob. "Mr. Hartley, you have been paying some attentions to my sister."

Hubert bowed.

"And these attentions have excited the notice of people."

"Possibly!" said Hubert.

"That being the case," said Bob, "I wish to make it quite clear to you that these attentions are very objectionable."

"To whom?" asked Hubert.

"To me, to Marie—to all of us," said Bob.

"Without a doubt," said Hubert, "you are in a position to speak for yourself; but I fear you are in error with regard to Marie and Mrs. Grainger."

"Indeed!" sneered Bob.

"Yes; and I have this afternoon proposed to your sister and been accepted. I may add, that Mrs. Grainger entirely approved; and if unhappily we shall not succeed in getting your approval, I fear we must do without it. Won't you come in?"

"I come in!" said Bob. "No! And darning as you have been, I see if I can't keep you out of Denyville. A pretty march has been stolen upon me; but I'm not beaten yet. My sister shall not marry a beggar."

"I am not a beggar," said Hubert, "and I am not a beggar."

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CHAPTER VII.

A WEDDING AND A DISCOVERY.

"MR. DEAR HUBERT,—You astonish—you amaze me. I am confounded and humiliated; and I should be obliged to fly the country but for the part of my being chained here, as you are, by a chain of roses. It may seem odd to you, but I assure you that I am not sorry that I have done Miss Grainger so gross an injustice. You see how the case stands. Without that injustice I should have procured my suit, and who knows but that I might have induced her to marry me. That act would have robbed you, my dearest friend, of one of the dearest women in the world, and effectually stopped my thinking of Ida, who, I assure you, is the very woman for a man like me. She is just the pilot that is wanted for such a crank-going ship as I am. You shall see her one day. By-the-way, why should we not come to the wedding? Ida will rush into the office of bridesmaid, and I shall gladly embrace the position of groomsmen, and there you are fitted up with the requisites for the ceremony. Ever your old fellow, with the accustomed good wishes,—"

"GORDON GRAY."

This letter made Hubert Hartley smile—he was always in a smiling mood now—and he took it to Marie, who read it and smiled too.

"Gordon Gray must be fond of letter-writing," she said; "for he has written to me also. Would you like to see what he has to say for himself?"

"Very much," replied Hubert.

"Don't forget that he used to think he was in love with me and may not have got over his folly."

"I can understand all that, and forgive him as matters are, but I never would have pardoned him if he had carried you away from me."

"Oh, Hubert! what absurdities you talk."

"It is the absurdity of honest truth then, dearest."

Gordon Gray's letter to Marie was a simple, manly apology. With her he did not indulge in any of the light fanciful expressions he was used to indulge in, but wrote earnestly and evidently sincerely.

"I shall never be really happy," he wrote in one place, "until I have heard your forgiveness from your own lips. I have told Ida all, and she says that no apology I could offer you would be sufficient, but your forgiveness may help me to forget the past."

"All this is very nice," said Marie, "but I fear he is too sensitive."

"Not a bit of it," replied Hubert; "a sensitive man is never an absolute fool, and there is sure to be some good at the bottom of him."

"He is rather indefinite about his *flaw*," said Marie; "it is Ida and nothing else. Do you know an Ida?"

"There was Ida Stapleton," said Hubert, musing, "a very charming girl—the people are neighbours of Gordon Gray. But she was only a school-girl when I saw her last."

"And how long ago is that, pray?"

"Oh, don't be jealous, I have never thought of her since we met last—two years or more ago."

"A girl will change to a woman in six months," said Marie, "so we will assume that it is Ida Stapleton. But I can't ask her here without a chaperone; and we are too poor to fill our house with guests."

"So we are," said Hubert, gravely; "and as for a wedding present, I have been exercising my mind as to what I ought to give you."

"Nothing, Hubert—give me nothing."

"But I must, or what will the world say? I think we will make a mystery about it."

"How a mystery?"

"I will present you with a small box, which is not to be opened until we have started on our wedding trip."

"What a cruel idea, Hubert! Don't forget that my two cousins, Annie and Phoebe, are going to be bridesmaids; and if we have

Ida Stapleton there will be then four girls to be driven mad with unsatisfied curiosity."

"Nevertheless," said Hubert, firmly, "it must be done—our poverty must be covered somehow; and if it is only an empty box you and I need not quarrel over it. As for the bridesmaids, their curiosity will have died away ere we return from our week's honeymoon."

"Let us hope so," said Marie, softly, "but I do pity them. I can picture myself under the circumstances, and the thought is almost too dreadful."

"But now, are you not curious?"

"Not a bit, I assure you."

There were only two people in the whole of Morton Staveley who took umbrage at the approaching wedding, the rector and Bob Grainger.

It was the rector's decided opinion that curates ought not to marry, and he expressed himself very strongly to Hubert on the subject. His remarks were received good naturedly; but he was given to understand that his curate meant to marry, though the act incurred his abiding wrath. Hubert did not reply exactly in these words, but he conveyed them in a form that was unmistakable to the rector.

A grumbling assent was then given, coupled with a gloomy prophecy on what would become of the parish during the week Hubert must be absent. All the old and young men would "fall away," and become backsliders at the village inn; and the old women would pine for the lack of spiritual sustenance. As for the rector he would be worked to death, but even that prospect did not daunt Hubert Hartley. He had made up his mind to be married, and there was an end of it.

Bob's wrath secretly took a very spiteful form.

With great deliberation he let Morton Staveley know that he disapproved. No opportunity that offered for disparaging his prospective brother-in-law was thrown away. He called him "that impudent, penniless beggar of a curate," and swore by all that he held dear that on the wedding-day he would absent himself from home.

In spite of him, however, the wedding duly came off, and everything went "merry as a marriage bell," the happy pair starting in the highest of spirits for their brief tour.

"A week is a short honeymoon," said Bob, "and that's enough to turn everybody against them; and fancy going to Morley's farm."

"Only for a time," said Mrs. Grainger, "until they can get a cottage."

"A cottage," groaned Bob; "that's a nice thing. By-the-way, did you know that the Limes was let?"

"No, indeed! Who is coming there?"

"Nobody seems to know; but let it be, and the workmen have begun upon it. They say the new tenant is going to spend five hundred pounds upon it. He has bought the lease."

"It is a very pretty place," said Mrs. Grainger, "and I wonder it has not been let before."

"Who would live at Morton Staveley," grumbled Bob, "if they could live elsewhere?"

"I came here a bride," said Mrs. Grainger, "and I should not like to leave it. Marie is fond of Morton Staveley too."

"She is fond of a good many things just now, or fancies she is, that she won't care much about by-and-by. They are coming home to-morrow, and the people talk of giving them a reception. Hartley seems to have somehow sneaked into the affections of the people."

"You will like him better one day, Bob."

"I don't like beggars."

It was an old and somewhat hackneyed theme, the poverty of Hubert Hartley, and Mrs. Grainger declined to go on with it. She was busy in making a few preparations for the reception of Marie and her husband. They were expected at three o'clock.

In a perturbed spirit Bob wandered about. Matters were worse than ever with him. He had two county court summonses in his pocket,

and Byles had spoken pretty plainly about the money that was due to him. Bob literally had not a shilling.

The poorest of men always manage somehow to have tobacco by them; and Bob had his.

Filling his pipe, he wandered off to the village to see if the inhabitants really meant to keep their creed, and give that poverty-stricken curate a reception.

They were evidently in earnest, for quite a number of people were about in holiday attire, and an arch of modern dimensions had been run up at the end of the street.

Byles, a big, burly fellow, with a stolid face, was actively engaged in giving it a few finishing touches.

To him Bob rashly addressed himself.

"Got a good paying job there?" he said.

"Pays better than lending money to them as ought to be my betters!" replied Byles.

"Oh, does it?" said Bob. "Well, if you have lent any money you needn't bother about it, I dare say you will be paid."

"The sooner the better!" said Byles.

"But I can't waste time talking to you. Your betters are coming."

At this some of the rustics, who were assisting Byles, grinned, and Bob went away with an arrow ranking in his heart.

Hard and selfish as he was there was something in him to be touched if the hand that struck was only strong enough to send the weapon home.

"By George!" he muttered, "I have to put up with something now. I can't stand that sort of thing. I would sooner be a hundred miles across the sea."

He returned to Denvilles by a circuitous route, taking his time so as not to reach home until past four o'clock. Hubert and Marie had arrived, both wondrously handsome and in the highest spirits.

Marie came and gave Bob a kiss, and Hubert held out his hand. He accepted both sulkily enough.

"You have had fine weather," he said; "it's been like summer here."

This was in its way decidedly melting on his part, and they were soon all talking together.

"The Limes," said Marie, after a time, "will not be ready for a month."

"And why need you bother about that," asked Bob.

"Seeing that we are going to live there," answered Hubert. "I think we have every right to be interested."

"You will have to screw mighty tight to live there," said Bob, grimly.

"At any rate," said Hubert, "we will endeavour not to get into difficulties."

By-and-by Bob's attention was drawn to a small box on the table. It was given to Marie by Hubert, with strict injunctions that it should not be opened till after their return.

"A matrimonial curiosity, I suppose?" he said.

"Look into it," replied Marie.

Curiosity prompted him to look into it, and he saw a beautiful diamond necklet and pendant, worth at the least five hundred pounds.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed; "where did you get this from?"

"I found it there," replied Marie, "when I opened it."

Bob's face now was the picture of amazement. He stared from one to the other in helpless amazement. Hubert came to his rescue.

"I confess," he said, "that I allowed you to think I had lost all when only a small portion of my fortune went in the unlucky Luck-for-All Mine. I did it for a purpose."

"Never mind that," interposed Marie, "it is all forgotten."

"Very well," said Hubert. "I remained rich still, and I professed to be poor. The rest, I think, must be pretty clear to you."

Bob walked to the window, stayed there a minute, and then came back again.

"What do you think of me, Hartley?" he asked, abruptly.

"Oh! never mind that," said Hubert, plagiarising Marie's words, "it is all forgotten."

"But it isn't, and it can't be by me," said Bob. "I see what I have been—an idle, worthless fellow. It is I who have been the beggar. You shall advance me one loan more—only one, just sufficient to carry me across the sea. I shall do better abroad than at home."

After some little demurring on Marie's part it was settled that Bob should try his luck in one of the colonies, for a few years at least, and the moment his future was decided Bob began to develop in a better fellow.

He was almost an energetic fellow when the time for his departure came, and he went away breathing promises of future good conduct, and it is satisfactory to know that he has done his best, and is a thriving Canadian farmer.

Seven years have elapsed, and Hubert is no longer curate, but rector of Morton Staveley. The living is not a very lucrative one, but that does not matter to him. The people declared they could not do without him, and the bishop gave him the post.

With a loving wife and three little ones he had little else to care for.

The world is very bright to him—brighter than it is to many thousands of both rich and poor. He has not, however, much of the weariness—the disappointments—the heart-burnings of life, and it is to be hoped he never will.

[THE END.]

BROWN AS A BERRY.

CHAPTER XLIX.—(continued.)

RONALD almost thinks not. And then there is the boy. He has liked him hitherto, because he was her child; but suppose the time should come when he should hate him because he bears his father's name?

Will possessing her compensate for every ill? He knows he would be wretched if he lost and had to live without her; but what if he should be more miserable in the winning of her for his wife?

Looking the future steadily in the face, he sees all the shoals and quicksands that will make difficult his ways; and, burying his head in both his hands, groans aloud.

Berry's sympathy is aroused. She has not supposed him to be capable of such earnest feeling, nor does she guess that there is more doubting than despair in this sudden breaking down.

"Speak to her before you go, and tell her you will come again," she advises, in her most gentle and sympathetic tones; and as she speaks she sees through the open door, slowly pacing up and down outside, Eve alone.

"Go now," she urges, with a quick encouraging smile; and wringing both her hands impulsively and gratefully in farewell, he follows her advice and goes.

Not meaning to be curious, only anxious, above all things, for Eve's happiness, Berry watches them with keenest interest.

At first their conversation is evidently purely general, and on different subjects; then Berry sees Eve's face quiver and whiten, and knows the decisive words have been spoken.

Will she give him hope, even the slightest to sustain him through all the months, maybe years, that must elapse before she can reward his constancy? Or will the spirit of self-accusation prove too strong, and cause her to wreck the well-being of them both for conscience sake?

It has been such a sad, sad story; but can any good be effected to the man who had died, unloved as he had lived, by so tardy and incomplete a reparation? A morsel of delight while living, and able to enjoy, is worth all that restfulness which is given in the grave; and of

what value would be the constancy to a feeling that is not love?

Mrs. Chester had never loved her husband, and no composition of regret, sentiment, and faithfulness to an idea can take the place of the affection that never was. He himself would be the first to reject such a miserable substitution. So she feels; but how will Eve decide now the question has been put to her, and an answer is required?

She has seated herself, and Ronald is at her feet, praying and imploring for the gift that, now it is withheld, he knows to be wholly good. Not a trace of doubt is in his voice, only agonised entreaty, changing presently into despair.

The sea-blue eyes that have been his Paradise on earth are gazing far away into vacancy, and as he pleads, half unconsciously, perhaps, she raises her hand, and with almost motherly tenderness brushes the curls from his brow. He seizes the hand, and kisses it. Then she remembers, and with a murmured rebuke rises again to her feet.

She comes towards the drawing-room, and he follows, pleading still, forgetting Berry's presence, forgetting everything except that he is about to lose his love for the second time. With a last forlorn hope of changing her resolution, he catches hold of her gown as she stands upon the threshold, expending all the force of his emotions in his upturned passionate face rather than in the words that are slowly uttered.

"Oh! my dear, my dear! is there no hope?" She shakes her head.

"Not if I come again after years spent in the loving and thought of you?"

Again she shakes her head.

He releases her, then falling back apparently convinced; and she enters the room sighing.

No comment is made upon what has passed between the two; but all through Mrs. Chester is very silent and subdued, scarcely even noticing her child, whose baby mind is doubtless much exercised to discover the reason of the sudden cessation of those caresses which have ordinarily been so lavishly bestowed.

Berry begins to wonder whether, after all, she has not been mistaken, whether her sister's power of will is not stronger than she had supposed. But who can account for the vagaries of the sex?—

"She is a woman, and the ways unto her
Are like the finding of a certain path
After deep-fallen snow."

CHAPTER L.

"I am so glad to have seen you before you go!"

It is Spencer Blythe who is speaking, but Berry is too overcome with the sight of him so changed, to answer with a suitable commonplace at once.

She has met him on the Mall for the first time since his accident, and though she had heard so much of the agonies he had undergone she is scarcely prepared for this.

He is in a hospital doolie that has been altered to form something like a jampan, lying at full length, and his worn expression testifies only too clearly to the suffering through which he has passed; yet he tries to reassure her with a smile.

"You go to England to-morrow, do you not?" he asks.

"Yes, we leave Rani Tol. Mr. Blythe, how very ill you must have been to look so badly now?"

"I am rather a ghost, am I not? But the worst is over. I hope to follow you soon."

"Home?"

"Yes, home. If such a word is applicable to the stately mansion where dwells my invalid father, with his old-fashioned retainers, who are too aged to care for anything but themselves and their own gouty ailments. One advantage is, I shall be more in tune with them all this time than I have ever been before, and perhaps under the circumstances they will welcome me."

He speaks lightly at first, but verges into bitterness as the picture rises vividly before him; and it might have been so different. "Don't look so sorry for me, please, Miss Cardell. Sympathy is so apt to engender self-pity, a weakness of which I have never yet been guilty. Of course I shall pull along all right."

"What a miserable life you have before you!" she exclaims, with unwise impulsiveness, but forgetting everything in her overwhelming pity for his plight. To see the once strong man so weak, and to know that he is debarred from most of the pleasures he had before enjoyed is so infinitely sad. How can she help being touched?

"No, no, you must not say that; I am the better, not the worse, for having loved you, Berry. If I had never known you I might have felt this more, but having failed to win your love, all other evils seem of no account. Crippled as I am, I have the memory of you to sustain me."

"I have done nothing, nothing at all to make you think so well of me," she protests, humbly.

"Then perhaps it is true what I have heard that as it is an education to love a clever woman, so it is a benediction to love a good one. At all events, I have found it so, and—and I needed such a blessing sorely."

She cannot but believe his words. All the frivolity and littleness of purpose that before had marred the expression of his face are swept away, and his features are re-ennobled by the greatness of his patience, and a grand endeavour to live down the past, proving his penitence by practice more than preaching. He has always been a handsome man, but he is beautiful now with that beauty which only deep thought can give, and which he also owes to the earnestness that sprang to life while lying on that bed of suffering which nearly proved a bed of death.

Berry wonders at her own insensibility, and would be quite ready to agree with anyone who condemned her for her want of taste. Although weakly still, and an invalid for life, he is nevertheless a finer man than John Carew ever was or could become; and has almost in every respect more to recommend him to a woman's favour. But then it must be recollected that the mischievous little Pagan God is blind, which accounts for some of the most glaring of his follies and apparently motiveless mistakes.

"You have no brothers, nor sisters?" she asks him, gently.

"One sister, if you will let me call you so; a little for my own sake, and more for Carew's."

"Why for *his*?" she stammers out, and then wishes she had let the remark pass without challenging its cause. Anything would be better than the standing here with downcast eyes and crimson cheeks while her secret is being ruthlessly read, and she, perhaps, is being despised for wearing her heart upon her sleeve.

"Have I guessed wrongly? I hope not. He and I have grown such friends of late. I think I could see you become *his* wife without overmuch regret, having no hope myself. He loves you so sincerely, and I thought that you loved him."

"I—I," she begins, stammering, but stops there, not knowing how to proceed without sacrificing truth to dignity.

"Don't let me distress you. That was in nowise my intention. It is like my impudence, is it not? pleading for another where I could not win myself; but I do not wish a misunderstanding of any sort to part you. When Jack seeks you out again, don't let any doubt of him poison your mind against him, and influence your reply."

"I—I am sure you are only speaking from the kindest motives," she assures him, in confusion.

"Then that is all right. And now good-bye. So ends, I suppose, my acquaintance with Miss Cardell. I wonder if I shall have the pleasure

of renewing a friendship with Mrs. John Carew?"

He points the remark with a wicked smile, that sends her away with only a nodded farewell, blushing violently, and half offended at his characteristic openness of speech.

But try as she will to banish the remembrance, the words will ring still in her ears.

"Mrs. John Carew!" How pleasantly it sounds, and then with her lips she forms the short, familiar name by which twice she has heard him called, "Jack! Jack!"

Over and over again she says it, until her cheeks redden at her own boldness, and her eyes grow larger and more luminous with a thousand stirring thoughts.

She loves him so dearly—so dearly—all the more that she has repressed her love so long, and now, for the first time, allows herself a vent.

Neither demonstrative nor romantic generally, something comes surging up to her brain that sweeps away all the willfulness and pride, and makes her fain to confess that love is lord of all; even of the self-reliant little heart that hitherto has bravely stood alone.

She knows what is lacking in her life, and a womanly tenderness suffusing all her face glorifies it into more than mere prettiness for the time. She is in the humour to be wooed and won; and it is fortunate that John Carew, happening to see her from the distance, hastens after her to say farewell, instead of leaving it to the morrow as he had intended.

She starts as he says her name to claim her attention, and yet she is not much surprised. It is so natural he should be there, now, when her heart is so full of him and of her love for him.

She waits breathlessly for his next words, half expecting he will have read her thoughts, and claim her immediately for his own; and oh! how willingly would she admit his rights! But, man-like, he blunders in the beginning. He knows there is an unusual radiance in the mobile face that flushes so bewilderingly beneath his gaze, but how can he guess its cause? It may be that she is glad to leave this place and with it all memory of a past in which he has had a share.

"And so you are going back to England?"

An observation natural enough under the circumstances; it had also been Mr. Blythe's opening remark, but to her it comes now as a death-blow to all the hopes which had sprung up mushroom-like in an hour.

She had thought from what Spencer Blythe had said that he loved her still, but they have both been mistaken. That is all she can take in at first, afterwards she can find refuge in the weeping which will be "wild with all regret."

"Yes, we are going home."

He notices the coldness that has crept into her voice, and attributes it to his presence. Were it not for appearances he would relieve her of it at once; but custom is so strong, and having joined her, it is only common civility to accompany her on her way.

"And you will live—where? It is not impertinent, I hope, to ask?"

"We scarcely know ourselves. We have no relations nor connections to help us to a decision."

"But friends?"

"Nor even friends. Colonel Lennox and Lady Blanche we leave behind us here. They will not go home for some years, now that he has the command. We shall be utterly alone. Except Susan, there is no one in all England will be glad to see us back."

"And Susan, who is she?"

"Only an old servant who was with us before we left. We are destitute indeed—are we not?" with a wistful, tearful smile.

"Yet you will be glad to go, of course?" he says, feeling it his duty to carry on the conversation, although suffering acutely at the sight of her distress, and only longing for the walk to come to an end so that he may be alone with his sorrow.

He would rather never look upon her face again than be so near as this, knowing that

he is nothing to her now, or, what is worse, a source of embarrassment if she has not utterly forgotten all that was and is no more.

"I like India," she replies.

"I remember you always said so. But has the reality come up to the brilliant picturing of your imagination?"

"I have nothing against the country in itself. If I have not been happy here, it is my own fault, and that of others."

He is puzzled at the sigh with which she finishes, and for the first time a half suspicion of the truth flashes suddenly across his mind. His eyes brighten, and he questions, with what might seem a heartless eagerness to anyone unacquainted with his thoughts:—

"You were not happy?"

"No. I don't think," with a little pitiful catching of her breath, "I don't think I have ever been really happy yet."

It is so true, and so pitiful because so true, that two big tears gather and fall, coursing slowly down her cheeks that have grown so white and cold.

He feels a mad yearning to take her in his arms and kiss her into contentment and warmth, but a new doubt assails him. If she has never known any joy all the time she has existed, what of those days at the end of the voyage out, which to him had been concentrated bliss? If his love afforded her no pleasure then, how can it console her now?

He forgets the wheels within wheels, the little rift within the lover's love that ever slowly widening had at last destroyed all.

"But you will be?" he assures her, with most unflinching sadness, considering that he means to be congratulatory.

"When?" opening her eyes wide, and wondering what he means.

"Your marriage is, I suppose, only postponed," and as though to impress her with his indifference to what she may reply, he takes up a stone and throws it carelessly along the ground.

It can be nothing to him, or at least shall be nothing what she may have chosen as her future fate.

"And you thought that would make my happiness?" she asks, reproachfully.

"Yes. Why not? Love generally confers contentment."

"There is no question of anything of the sort, Captain Carew. You know he never cured for me," indignantly.

"You don't mean to say he is a scoundrel, and has drawn out of the engagement?" he exclaims, fiercely, thinking that possibly in that lies the reason of her discontent, but wondering how anyone with a heart not a stone inside his breast could be so insensible, so cold.

The merry laugh with which she receives the suggestion goes far to undecieve him on this head, and her words reassure him quite.

"No, oh! no. It is not that at all. I do not care for him; that is why the wedding is not to be."

"Berry, have you ever cared for anyone?" he asks, impulsively, and bending, attempts to look into her eyes.

The little sweet face, with all its passionate possibilities of love and hate, might be its own reply. The colour comes and goes in uncontrollable confusion, and a golden light, that is unmistakably love, flames out of the great grey eyes. Love it is indeed, but love for whom?

"I wish—I wish it had been for me," he mutters, hoarsely, the words forced from his lips by the violence of his emotion; although he had firmly resolved never to pester her again with the story of his love.

They have come to the entrance of the compound and he stops short, intending to leave her there.

"What a boor you must think me, Miss Cardell, to question you as to your thoughts at all," he says, pulling himself together with an effort, but breathing hard and fast still, and then adds, moodily,—

"Perhaps I had better go!"

"Not yet; let me tell you first that I have only lately heard what should have been told me long ago."

"About Margaret?" he asks, feeling all the awkwardness, a lover naturally feels at mentioning the name of any woman he has even slightly cared for to another that he has loved.

She nods her head.

"I am glad you no longer misjudge me. It is pleasant to know that if you sometimes think of me it will be with kindness, even though it can never be with love."

Berry is dimpling and smiling in mischievous delight, all her coquetry and light-heartedness returning with the certain knowledge of his love. She can scarcely refrain from throwing herself in his arms, and telling him she does love him so much—so much that she has no room for any other loving in her heart.

Instead she asks him, demurely,—

"Are you quite sure of that?"

He looks at her in amazement, tempered with something like anger. It is enough she has made him miserable for life. She need not mock his pain.

"Of course. At least I suppose so. I—I don't understand. Why do you ask?" he jerks out, incoherently.

"Because"—with a smile that flushes all over her face and makes it radiant with fun—"Because I am not half so sure myself."

He sees all her meaning at once. If he could misconstrue the arch smile there is no misreading the love-light in her eyes—love strong as death, true as steel, and all—all for him.

"You can really love me, after all?"

"I—I will try."

They are standing hand in hand and face to face, presently it will be heart to heart; but just now it is enough to know that all is clear between them, that never again can there be any doubt or fear.

They are both laughing, yet both on the verge of tears, for such a sudden, unexpected happiness is as hard to bear as sorrow.

Berry's lip quivers with emotion that is not altogether mirth, and now that they have told their tale her eyes are cast shyly to the ground.

The sun as it sets rests coldly on the everlasting snows, and in only a few minutes darkness will have fallen on the land, without any tender warning of the twilight; but in their hearts is an overflow of light and warmth such as nothing can dampen nor destroy.

Not even the pale, passionless shining of a shadowy moon discourages them, although she must have looked upon so many, and afterwards again smiled icily on their disappointed hopes and altered minds.

But since the first lovers looked and loved did any man or woman ever question that their own loves were the deepest and truest of all others? It is more to pleasure himself with the remembrance of a fact, than to satisfy a doubt, that John Carew presently asks,—

"And you mean it, dear; you will really be my wife?"

And for the second time in answer to such an asking, Berry breathes rather than speaks the one word:—"Yes."

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

An extraordinary thing in ladies' bonnets—a cheap one.

"I am in favour of the elevation of the human race," as the hangman remarked just before springing the trap.

Yes, man is a creature of habit. Once let him contract the habit of begging his tobacco and he'll never buy another ounce.

"I am at the truth," said Stoggles.

"Yes," said Poggles, but you don't score one out of a possible fifty."

An old lady says that she hears every day of civil engineers, and wonders if there is no one to say a civil word for guards.

An old lady with several unmarried daughters feeds them on fish diet because it is rich in phosphorous, and phosphorous is the essential thing in making matches.

A CROSS COUNTRY.—Jack Oldstock: "We're very proud of our ancestry, you know." Tom Parvenu: "Yes, I know; but how would your ancestry feel about you?"

A SHARP Hebrew boy was asked one day at a German public school—"Wherein did Joseph's Brethren do wrong in selling him to the Egyptians?" "They sold him too cheap," was the prompt reply.

MENTAL DERANGEMENT.—The Squire: "Well, Grubbs, how are you?" Grubbs: "Well, sir, I'm only middlin'." Doctor: "says when I fell off o' that there stack I got an infernal confusion!"

"I saw Mr. Bibulous give five shillings to a mendicant this morning," said Mrs. Rattler to her husband. "I don't care what people say about Mr. B.'s failings, there are a great many good qualities in the man, and that one action shows he is filled with the milk of human kindness." "Or was full of milk punch," retorted Rattler.

FATHER O'KEELY: "Oh, Pat, Pat, stealing pigs again, I hear. You know I only absolved you last time on condition you paid the owner their value." Pat: "Yes, yer civ rence." But when I buy a pig from Mick Doonan, he fixes the price; now when I stole a pig, it's meself that fixes it—and bedad, your civ rence, there's a dale o' difference!"

YOUNG B. carried a piece to Gondinet and asked him to note with a cross the scenes that appeared to him to be defective. Some days afterwards Gondinet returned the manuscript. "Not a single cross, dear master?" "No; your comedy would look like a cemetery!"

A COACH AND FOUR came driving into Uniontown at full speed, and just as it drew up in front of the hotel one of the horses dropped dead. "That was a very sudden death," remarked a bystander. "Sudden!" replied the driver; "that horse died nine miles from here, but I wouldn't let him drop until I got him into town."

"WHEN were these eggs boiled?" asked a man of a negro lunch-dealer. "Dis mawmin' sah." "Well, then, they're no account. I can't eat an egg that hasn't been boiled several days." "Oh, does yer mean when da was first biled? Da was biled fast-las' week, an' was only biled ober dis mawmin' sah."

"WHAT was the trouble between you and another party, Mike, last evening?" inquired a citizen of his Hibernian porter. "Well, yer see, sir, it was a bit of hesitation on his part." "A bit of hesitation?" "Yes, sir. You see I gave him the choice av my two fists, an' he seemed to hesitate, loike, an' when I see he couldn't make up his mind I jist gave him the two av thim for luck."

"WHAT a resemblance there is between you and your husband, Mrs. Smith!" said a friend of the family. "Did anyone ever call your attention to it before?" "Oh, yes," broke in Fenderson; "they were walking out together, and I heard a man remark, 'How much the woman looks like her son!'" "No, no, that wasn't it," added Fenderson, seeing the cloud on Mrs. Smith's face; "what he said was, 'How much that old fellow looks like his mother!'"

THE WAY TO DO IT.

"How can I keep the cattle from breaking down the fence to get into my garden at night?" said an Austin man to a neighbour.

"That's easy enough."

"But how can I keep the cattle from breaking down the fence?"

"By leaving the gate open."

SOCIETY.

The Queen's health continues to maintain the distinct improvement of the last month, and the further change to Scotland will doubtless prove beneficial. Princess Beatrice accompanies Her Majesty as usual. The Princess is much better again, the benefit accruing to her health from her sojourn at Aix being evidently of an enduring character.

It has been stated in various quarters that the Prince of Wales intends to visit Mr. Smith Dorrian, at Eresco Abbey, in the Bailly Isles, in the course of the present autumn. If so, it will be the first royal visit to that portion of the Duchy.

The festivities at Westminster and all the countryside about Langley, celebrating the majority of Viscount Weymouth, which we briefly noticed last week, were carried out on an elaborate scale, and passed off without a single hitch.

The sword and sabretache, presented by the Westminster troop of the Wiltshire Yeomany Cavalry, which regiment is under the command of Lord Bath, were accompanied by an address, and the presentation also took place at Langley House, the troop luncheon there, and being shown the magnificent apartments occupied by the Prince and Princess of Wales on their visit to Langley two years ago. The culmination of the festivities took place on Tuesday, when the Marquis of Bath gave a garden fete to some 1,400 of his neighbours and friends. Outside the old gardens in which this fete was held were some 25,000 people, all of whom watched many of the events, and particularly the fireworks in the evening, with great interest, the cheers at times being quite deafening.

SIR CHARLES and Lady Wolsley met with an enthusiastic reception on the 13th ult., on their arrival at Wolsley, the family seat in Staffordshire. They were received at the railway station by the inhabitants of Wolsley, Colwich, and Rugeley, and a troop of the yeomany, of which Sir Charles is lieutenant, and, amidst the cheers of the people and showers of rice, drove off, escorted by the yeomany, to Wolsley. The route, extending over two miles, was spanned at intervals by triumphal arches, decorated with flags, and bearing the following among other inscriptions: "Welcome to Sir Charles and his Bride," "Welcome to the Home of a Thousand Years," "Welcome to the Home of the Ancient Oak," &c. On the following days "high jinks" were held in the neighbourhood, and the happy pair received some valuable presents.

A very pretty wedding was that of Edward Evelyn, eldest son of Canon Harcourt-Vernon, of Grove Hall, Notts, with Frances Theresa, youngest daughter of Sir William FitzHerbert, Bart., of Tiesington Hall, Derbyshire, and West Farleigh, Kent, which took place at the parish church, West Farleigh, Maidstone, on Wednesday, the 22nd ult. The bride wore a bodice and train of ivory-white embossed velvet, skirt of satin de Lyons, trimmed with jabot of Brussels point lace (the gift of her father), and sprays of orange blossom and myrtle; ornaments of diamonds and sapphires; a wreath and tulle veil. She carried a magnificent bouquet. The bridesmaids were dressed in cream lace, draped with apricot brocade; bonnets to match, with feather aigrettes. They each carried a mother-of-pearl and Brussels fan, and bouquets of white and apricot tea roses, the gifts of the bridegroom. The bridegroom was accompanied by his best man, Mr. Herbert Harcourt-Vernon. Miss FitzHerbert wore a becoming dress of white Ottoman silk and lace, with bonnet en suite. Mrs. FitzHerbert was dressed in electric-blue Indian cashmere, braided in silver; silver bonnet, trimmed to match, with blue feather aigrette.

STATISTICS.

SCOTCH SAVINGS.—During the past ten years, notwithstanding periods of considerable depression in trade, the amount of the deposit savings in the Post Office Savings Banks, in almost every county has nearly doubled. In some cases the total amount was more than doubled. In Argyllshire, for example, the amount at the close of last year stood at £26,637 in round numbers, as against £11,975 in 1873; Aberdeen, £51,541, against £27,569; Ayr, £55,498, against £37,262; Berwick, £16,115, against £7,399; Bute, £5,398, against £1,709; Caithness, £5,990, against £2,808; Clackmannan, £7,991, against £4,604; Cromarty, £1,050, against £263; Edinburgh, £70,597, against £37,872; Kinross, £6,950, against £2,783; Kircudbright, £10,856, against £4,959; Moray, £17,016, against £8,210; Nairn, £2,260, against £372; Ross, £19,391, against £7,580; Sutherland, £5,391, against £2,894; and Wigton, £11,402, against £5,498. There was also a large increase in the counties of Dumfries, Dumfries, Inverness, Kinross, Linlithgow, Perth, Renfrew, Roxburgh, Selkirk, Stirling, and even in counties so far north as Shetland and Orkney. Lanark (including Glasgow) was the county in which the least increase was registered, but there the deposits rose from £75,087 in 1873 to £99,609 in 1882.

GEMS.

Know the true value of time; snatch, seize and enjoy every moment of it. No idleness, no laziness, no procrastination. Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.

RIGHTNESS expresses of actions what straightness does of lines; and there can no more be two kinds of right action than there can be two kinds of straight lines.

MAN is greater than a world, than systems of worlds; there is more mystery in the union of soul with the physical than in the creation of a universe.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

APPLE PUDDING.—Sliced tart apples, bread crumbs, butter, sugar, cinnamon. Batter a pudding-dish very well and put in a layer of crumbs, then dots of butter, next sliced apples stewed with sugar and cinnamon, then more buttered crumbs. Repeat the layers in this order until your dish is full, with crumbs on top; bake covered, half-an-hour, or forty minutes for a large dish, turn out, pour liquid sauce over it, and eat hot with more sauce.

MERINGUES.—Whisk some whites of eggs to a stiff froth, mix with them, with a spoon, quickly and thoroughly, some loaf sugar finely powdered, in the proportion of one tablespoonful for each white of egg used, then place a sheet of white paper on a meringue board, and, with a tablespoon, lay out the mixture on it in heaps about the size of an egg, and about two inches apart, taking care to make them all as near as possible the same size and evenly shaped. "Sow a little powdered sugar over them, shake off what does not stick to the meringues, and at once place the board into a moderate oven. When the meringues have assumed a straw colour and are hard to the touch, take them out, detach them from the paper carefully, and either scoop out the inside or press it in with a teaspoon. Then replace them in the oven on a baking sheet to dry for half-an-hour or so. The oven must be very slack, and it is best to leave the door of it open during this part of the operation. When the meringues are cold, have ready some whipped cream, flavoured to taste, fill the hollow of each meringue with it, and join them in pairs by sticking together the under side of each, and serve.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A NOVELTY IN APPLIED SCIENCE.—The thieves of China, who are masters of their nefarious craft, prepare a composition of some medicated ingredient, supposed to be acconite, and lighting it, blow it into the room to be robbed, by means of a tube through a hole previously made (not a difficult thing in Chinese houses with paper windows and doors). The inmates are thus anesthetized or at least deprived of the power of speech and locomotion, and the thieves enter and do their work. In vain does the proprietor being robbed see the burglars. He cannot move limb or tongue. It is said that water absorbs this poison, and so for this purpose it is not uncommon for wealthy people to sleep with a basin of water at their heads. It is called *men hsing* or *hsien hsing*, to suffocate or asphyxiate with incense.

COLD BATHS.—The great mistake that is usually committed in regard to cold baths is the error of never raising the temperature of the water from that of the surrounding air. In very cold weather the bath, even when exposed overnight in the bedroom, will often be lower than forty-five degrees, and where water is brought straight from the main or well it may be even ten or fifteen degrees lower. Only the strongest constitutions can derive benefit from the shock produced by the application of a liquid sixty to seventy degrees colder than the body to its surface, and it is very questionable if it ever is attended with permanently good results. Reaction may be afterwards complete, but there is always a risk of sudden danger from the condition of the body being temporarily such as to prevent reaction. In such cases very serious accidents are possible, and a late instance of death may, perhaps, be regarded as an example in point. A temperature of from forty to fifty degrees is quite cold enough for any person to submit himself to; this allows of a difference of between forty and fifty degrees in the heat of the body and that of the bath—ample sufficient to produce all the benefits desirable from it—and it would be well for all if these extremes were never exceeded.

Too MUCH AT HOME.—It is surprising how soon a wife tires of the company of a man who is too much at home. Men are wise in getting away from their own roof-trees a certain portion of each day. Among their wives will be found a very general consensus of opinion to this effect. There will be found everywhere a disposition to pack off the men in the morning and to bid them keep out of the way till toward evening, when it is assumed that they will probably have a little news of the busy world to bring home, and when baby will be sure to have said something exceptionally brilliant and precocious. The general events of the day will afford topics of conversation more interesting by far than if the whole household had been together from morning till night. A very little inquiry, too, will elicit the fact that men about home all day are eminently apt to be fidgety and grumpy and interfering—altogether objectionable, in short. This is the case very often, even with working men of genius—authors, or persons, or painters—but it is particularly apt to be so with the unemployed, such, for instance, as business men who have retired, or who are out of the harness for a short time. The spirit of mischief is never at a loss for a job for pater-familias if it catches him idling and lounging about, neither at work nor at play. It stirs up his bile and irritability, very likely, and incites him to the reform of domestic abuses. It kindles his sanitary ardour, and sends him peking and sniffing about inconveniently into all the odd corners of the establishment; or sets him about the curtailments of housekeeping extravagance, or the amendment of various unmethodical household procedures, all of which, however right and proper, tends to disturb domestic peace and quietude, and to make all the feminine members of the family very uncomfortable.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

H. R.—You can summon for illegal detention if we understand your statement.

M. A. G.—The 12th of September, 1888, fell on a Wednesday.

B. T. D.—If she loves you, and "never gives up her notions about"—you, you ought to be satisfied.

A. J. R.—It is not at all likely that there is any way by which you can ever recover your watch, and you might as well give up bothering yourself about it.

J. C.—The single lady is introduced to the married lady, and the single gentleman to the married, other things being equal.

P. W. J.—If an object is to be indicated you must move the whole hand, or the head, but never point with the finger. If one is obliged to touch any object in indicating it, let it be with all the fingers, and not with a single one, as it is the habit of bumpkins.

ANNEKA.—When a lady offers to drive a gentleman in her phaeton, he should walk to her house if he accepts the invitation, unless, the distance being great, she should propose to call for him. Under such circumstances, he will be on the watch, and, if possible, meet her on the way.

L. M. F.—Perhaps she expected that you would follow her out to the well, and there ask for the pleasure of seeing her home. Or she may have wanted to avoid giving you a chance to ask her for that privilege, and so slipped away before you had an opportunity to do so. If you are particularly desirous of learning just what motives actuated her, it would be a good plan for you to ask her what she meant.

CORINA.—The size of your dining-room and the limits of your table will determine, in a measure, the number of your guests; and, if possible, you should invite an equal number of gentlemen and ladies, unless the party is given wholly to gentlemen, when the lady of the house does not appear, but the nearest gentleman friend of the family takes her place.

MORRA.—The propriety of giving a young gentleman your photograph, even on a short acquaintance of three months, could not be called into question, provided your parents or others in authority viewed the matter favourably. Nothing is truer than the aphorism "circumstances alter cases," and there are few rules to which an exception cannot be brought. Our answer would be affected very materially in either direction by a knowledge of the young man's character.

M. R. T.—In such a matter a wife should respect her husband's feelings, and she should be able to exercise enough womanly tact to make her brothers-in-law understand that their carresses were not welcome, without hurting their feelings. You are probably a little over-sensitive, however, especially in the case of your own brothers, but if the thing should continue in defiance of your wishes, you would be fully justified in remonstrating with your relatives, at any cost to their, or any one else's, feelings.

W. N. D.—It is very unfortunate that two men should love a girl who is so little capable of any really true affection as to engage herself, with apparent readiness, to one man at a time when as much of a heart as she had to bestow belonged to another. If your letter fairly reflects your disposition, we should certainly advise you to marry the richer man under any circumstances, and although the man to whom you are now engaged will undoubtedly suffer a good deal in consequence, he will live to look back with thankfulness on his escape.

MINA.—The word *avordupois* is the name of a system of weights commonly supposed to be derived from the French *avoir du poids*—to have weight, meaning some considerable weight as opposed to light articles, for which a different standard or measure was used. It has been suggested, however, that the word is perhaps derived from the French *averer* to verify, and du poids, weigh, and this view seems the more likely since *avordupois* is the earlier form of the word. The word is pronounced *aver doo-poise*.

P. W.—If the young lady's society gives you pleasure, it is quite fitting that you should call occasionally as a friend, even though you very properly consider yourself too young at nineteen to enter into any engagement to marry. To seclude yourself from the other sex until you make up your mind to marry, would not be at all a wise course, or one which would fit you to choose prudently and well when you did think the proper time had come; but, as a general rule, the young ladies who show a great deal of attention to young men at the first meeting are not those whose friendships are the most valuable.

ANDY J.—Happy marriages are founded upon various conditions. 1st. Respect for the object of fancy is as necessary to abiding happiness as that the heart should be interested. 2nd. There should be social equality, intellectual sympathy, and sufficient means. A great many people are hopelessly estranged by a social gulf between the families of the wife and husband. The man, if it is he who has faced the risk, will find in the end that he has made a sacrifice for which he has grievously miscalculated the cost. 3rd. A woman's first requisite should be a man who is domestic in his tastes, and a man's first object should be a woman who can make his home a place of rest for him.

N. D. V.—A plain gold band may be worn as an engagement ring, and it may serve as a wedding-ring.

DOLLIE J.—In a *l'la-t-la-tla* conversation, however interesting, it is extremely ill-bred to drop the voice to a whisper, or to converse on private matters.

LAUNDRESS.—1. All depends on the quality of your own voice. Practice will improve it. 2. You are probably rather weak. Take a tonic and mix with society.

L. B. F.—Were a social dinner-party to be composed entirely of one profession, the conversation could not be of such diversity as when lawyers, doctors, ministers, and merchants are met together.

S. J.—Your handwriting is very much wanting in regularity and grace. The 25th of September, 1881, fell upon Thursday, and the 11th of September, 1888, upon Saturday.

P. C. F.—Although young in years and discretion, you should be wise enough to see and appreciate the folly of playing the coquette with your gentleman friends. Young ladies sooner or later find this to be detrimental to their very best interests.

F. W. G.—1. Not only should you not foster any feelings of regard which your professor may evince toward you, but you should carefully avoid giving him any encouragement for the expression of tender sentiments. Since he is a married man, he cannot honourably desire a quickening of the feelings of attachment which have unconsciously sprung up between you. 2. Composition good.

THE FLOWER OF HOME.

Beautiful flower, without my tender care
In thine own clime thou wouldst have lived and
flourished;
But now, like me, thou breath'st a colder air
Than sweeps the vale that thy young fibres nour-
ished.

And yet I love thee more, thou fragile one,
Than buds which nature nours to perfection;
They are bright children of the dew and sun,
But thou the drooping offspring of affection.

As oft I gaze upon thee, o'er my soul
Come with warm gush the visions of my childhood,
I hear once more the murmuring streamlet roll
Where grew thy lovely sisters of the wildwood.

I see the cottage, half embowered in leaves,
And mark the sunbeams on its white floor dancing;
I hear the sparrow twittering from the eaves,
Behold the loved faces from the casement glancing.

I hear a sound within, deep, solemn, low,
'Tis the old clock its measured warning pealing;
Now in the west fades sunset's crimson glow,
And evening o'er my cottage home is stealing.

'Tis all illusion, yet 'tis sweet to dream
Of those we love—absorbed are time and distance,
While memory sheds her talismanic gleam
On all that once lent rapture to existence.

W. R. B.

SANDY.—Twenty-seven is the generally admitted age, when the unmarried young lady becomes an old maid, though such an ordering is entirely arbitrary, for an old and experienced look is what, for the most part, decides, and this look is induced by many things besides increase of age. As you are but eighteen years of age, and fond of life and movement, it is highly improbable that any one could seriously class you with the old maids.

M. Y. S.—1. It is not usual to introduce people at morning calls in large towns; in the country it is sometimes done, not always. 2. The law of introductions is, in fact, to force no one into an acquaintance. You should, therefore, ascertain beforehand whether it is agreeable to both to be introduced; but if a lady or a superior expresses a wish to know a gentleman or an inferior, the latter two have no right to decline the honour.

S. T. R.—There is no short and easy way out of your difficulty. It can only be overcome by exerting a great deal of will-power and determination, in boldly facing the very things which you find hardest and most embarrassing. Remember for your consolation that many men have had great natural difficulties in the very paths in which they achieved the highest success. Demosthenes had an impediment in his speech, and the Earl of Beaconsfield was laughed down on his first attempt to speak in the House of Commons. Remember, too, that if you succeed in the struggle to overcome this one particular weakness, you will find yourself stronger, when called on to face any sort of work, which ought to be done, but which is not very pleasant to do.

R. N. D.—The old adage which you quote was probably applicable to the age in which it was originated. There were times in the past when it was considered fair in war to poison wells, and to murder prisoners who could not ransom themselves, or to sell them into slavery. Such proceedings would not be tolerated now—days in civilized countries. So, too, in old times, it was considered fair to poison a rival in love, or to kill him, or to cheat him out of his promised bride in any way possible. But in these days honesty and fair dealing are demanded in both love and war, and the old adage to which you refer is not now a rule of conduct.

P. W. R.—There are many who, though they will not confess it, nevertheless hold the idea that a woman demeans herself by manual labour, and that if she wishes to be considered a gentlewoman she must lead an aimless, useless life.

EMILIE.—There is nothing wrong in itself, in a young lady corresponding with a young man, provided that no deception or concealment from her friends is required, but it is not always a prudent course. If you wish to write simply as an exercise for your own improvement, always choose a correspondent of your own sex.

R. S. D.—The value of the old Bible to which you refer would depend on its style of printing and binding, its state of preservation, and the importance of the family whose record it contains. It may be very valuable, or it may be worth but little. The old coin which you mention is an old Spanish quarter, and would be worth but little, if any more than its face value.

LOTTIE.—1. Keep a dictionary beside you, and look up any word about which you feel in the least doubtful. 2. It is proper and natural to ask any friend who is separating from you to write occasionally, if you have reason to think that your friend cares enough about the intimacy to take the trouble to keep it alive by letter.

R. R.—There would be nothing gained by showing your betrothed the impertinent letters from your acquaintance, and you might cause her some pain by doing so. You would be quite justified in returning unopened, such letters. There is a difference of opinion as to whether the engagement ring should be worn on the forefinger or on the finger next the little finger, but most consider the latter preferable.

ANGUSTA F.—1. A young lady may very properly ask a friend of her own sex to introduce a gentleman to her, at any fitting opportunity. 2. A young lady is very foolish in forming acquaintances in any way, except through an introduction from some one who can at least vouch for the general respectability of the new acquaintance. The fact that a man happens to know a lady's name does not entitle him to any recognition.

N. H. O.—Opium is the hardened juice of the unripe seed of the poppy. Morphia, generally called morphia, is one of the alkaloid principles of opium. It is used under the various forms of sulphate, muriate, acetate, and valerate of morphia—all having the general properties of opium, and are given for similar purposes, in doses of one-eighth to one-quarter of a grain. One-sixth of a grain is about equal to one grain of opium of the medium strength. Unless prescribed by a regular physician let it alone.

WELL WISHER.—It would be very absurd for a man to hesitate about marrying a lady to whom he was attached because she had the same sort of complexion as himself. In such matters a man should have more strength and self-confidence than to care very much about the opinions of mere chance acquaintances and associates, and he should resent as an impertinence unsolicited advice about such a delicate relationship from any, except the few dear friends and relatives whom he knows to have his best interests at heart.

C. L.—Savings-banks are a modern institution. The first is claimed to have been founded at Hamburg, in 1778, but it is believed the first regularly chartered bank for savings was organised in 1804, at Tottenham High Cross, the nucleus thereof being the "Friendly Society for the Benefit of Women and Children," established five or six years previously by Mrs. Wakfield. In 1868 the Provident Institution of London was started. In 1810 Rev. Henry Duncan, minister at Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire, formed the first savings-bank in Scotland, and mainly through his efforts the Edinburgh Savings-Bank was established in 1814. Dr. Duncan is claimed as the founder of savings-banks because he devoted an immense amount of time to their establishment, originating and organising the first self-sustaining bank, and so arranging his scheme as to make it applicable to the whole country.

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